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132 PAGES

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

FEB. 1952
25¢

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A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE

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by Hunt Collins

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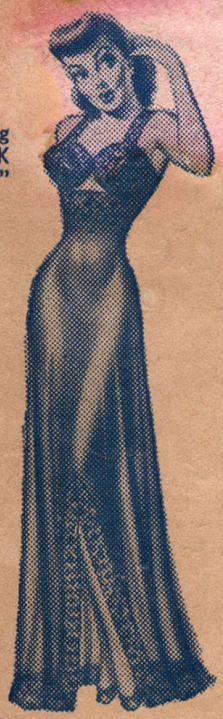

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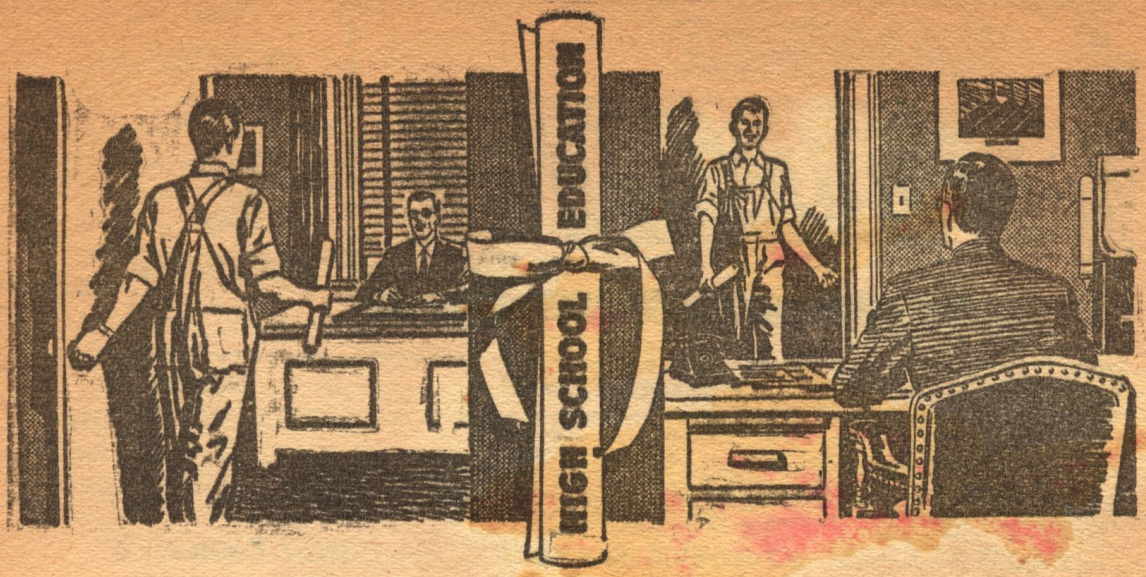

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Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

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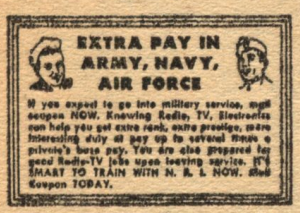
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Here, at last, was the missing body—the late John Edgar!

DEAD FREIGHT

Why steal a corpse? The victim had been hit by a car, and badly mangled; the undertaker's restoration-job surely couldn't show any evidence of murder, if murder the accident had been. But John J. Edgar's remains, coffin and all, had been stolen from the funeral parlor, and the thief was willing to kill to prevent its return!

HE WAS a thin guy with a pale, oval face and a hair-line moustache over his upper lip. He looked just the way I always expected an undertaker to look, right down to the black, pin-stripe suit, and the neatly-brushed homburg.

"So you're an undertaker, Mr. Panelli?" I asked, careful to keep the smile out of my voice and off my lips.

"A mortician," Panelli corrected.

"A mortician," I repeated. This was the first client I'd had in more than a week, and I didn't want to offend him.

He shifted uncomfortably in the chair near my desk, his homburg perched atop the cane between his knees.

"Now," I said, my voice all business, "what can I do for you?" I still had trouble not laughing at the idea of an undertaker visiting me. A mortician, that is.

"A rather strange thing has happened," he said. His eyes were sad, brown and deep, like two cavernous pockets of sorrow dug into his face. "I'm being sued."

"That's not so strange," I told him; "people get sued every day."

"Yes, yes, I understand," he said. He made a nervous movement with his right hand, like a little bird fluttering in the air. "The publicity," he

Feature Novel of Grisly Concealment

★ **By Hunt Collins** ★

moaned. "Never in the history of the Panelli Funeral Homes has such a thing happened."

"Want to tell me all about it?" I asked.

He nodded curtly, emphasizing the fact that he was here for exactly that reason. He pursed his lips for an instant, cleared his throat, and began. "This Edgar," he said, "John J. Edgar, a young man, thirty years old perhaps. An accident, automobile. Terribly mutilated, you understand. A difficult job, at best. We did a nice job, too."

"You handled the body?" I asked, trying to follow him.

"Yes. Four hundred and fifty dollars. It was a difficult job, very difficult. These accidents, you know. The family likes to remember the person as he was. We used a lot of wax on the face, and subdued lighting, very little on the face. A lovely coffin, too. White satin, chrome. A difficult job, but well done."

I nodded and offered him a cigarette. He refused, so I lit up and waited for him to go on. He sighed deeply and shook his head. "They never got to see the job. The family, I mean."

I frowned a little and asked, "How come?"

"That's why I'm being sued. It was all set-up, you understand, ready for the next morning. I was there the next morning, too, all ready. In black of course, befitting the occasion."

"Where's the trouble?" I asked.

"The deceased was missing. I mean, he had disappeared. Gone. Vanished."

"You mean the coffin was empty?"

"No. I mean, I don't know if it was empty or not. It was gone. Everything. Dead man, coffin, all."

I LOOKED into the guy's eyes to see if he was leveling. None could look that sad and not mean it, I thought. "Just gone? The coffin with the guy in it?"

"Yes. And now they're suing me." He raised his fist in the air and shook

it at the ceiling. "As if I would take a body! What would I do with a dead man? What possible use could I have for a..."

"It was stolen sometime during the night?" I asked.

"It must have been," Panelli said. "We finished work on it at twelve-thirty. I locked up personally. I was the last one out."

"And what time did you open in the morning?"

"Eight o'clock. They were waiting—the family I mean. We discovered the theft together. And now they sue me! How can they be so..."

"Did the lock show any signs of having been tampered with?" I interrupted.

"I don't know. Who looks at a lock? You open the door, that's all. Who expects to find bodies stolen? Twenty-five years in business, and I've never had a body stolen. Aghhh."

I took a deep drag on the cigarette and blew it out through my nose. He was right, of course; who expects anyone to steal a body? "You want me to find it, I suppose."

"Yes. Maybe then they'll stop suing. If it's not too late."

"Okay," I said; "you're on."

"Fine," he said. He reached into his inside pocket and pulled out an alligator wallet with gold trim. His initials, *J.P.*, were embossed in gold in the lower right-hand corner. "Will two hundred dollars be a sufficient retainer?"

"Just dandy," I said.

"I hope you find him," he said woefully. He took a card out of the wallet and put it on my desk. "This is my card." Then he reached into the wallet and placed a bill on the desk alongside the card. "This is the ad-

dress the Edgars gave. I suppose you'll get all the information you need from them."

He looked at the four-hundred-and-fifty-dollars marked in blue pencil on the bottom of the bill. He sighed deeply and said, with his finger on the numerals, "And they want it all back."

"Don't worry," I said; "I'll find the guy."

"It shouldn't be hard," he said. "A lot of wax, you know. He was unrecognizable when they brought him in. A very nice job, we did. Very nice." He sighed again, leaned on his cane and stood up. He set his homburg atop his head and gave it a little tap with the head of the cane, a gesture that seemed surprisingly undignified for the little mortician.

Then he left.

I POCKETED his card and the bill with the Edgars' address on it, and then I decided it was time for a snack. I walked over to the little refrigerator in the corner of my office behind the file cabinet. I took out bread from the bottom shelf and some ham wrapped in wax paper from the middle shelf. I took the butter, mustard, and a full bottle of milk from the top shelf, alongside the freezing unit, then spread them all on the top of my desk.

I ate two sandwiches and finished the quart of milk. I like milk, I always keep three or four bottles in the office. Some guys I know keep rye instead. Milk is cheaper, and I see straighter when I'm not drinking rye. Not that I'm a teetotaler; far from it. I just think alcohol and guns don't mix well.

Besides, I like milk.

And I once had to smash in a guy's skull with the butt of my forty-five because he thought a grown man drinking milk looked funny. You should see how funny *he* looked with his head in bandages.

I had a cigarette after lunch while I figured out my day. First stop would be the Edgars, for all the good that would do. From what Panelli had told me, I wouldn't be able to recognize this corpse even if I had a life-size photograph to lug around on my back. I finished the cigarette and dialed my telephone-answering service. The little Southern gal at the other end answered pertly, "Dial-O-Serve, good afternoon."

"Hello, honey," I said.

"Mistuh Lamb?" she asked.

That's my name. Guthrie Lamb. I once had to smash in another guy's skull because of it.

"That's me, honey," I said; "I'll be out all day starting right now."

"All right, Mistuh Lamb," she drawled.

"I'll call in tonight some time."

"All right, Mistuh Lamb," she said again.

"I'll bet you're as cute as a button," I told her.

"Maybe," she said.

"How do I find out?"

"Why, Mistuh Lamb, I hardly know you!" she said in mock surprise.

I chuckled a little and said, "All right, honey; some other time."

"I'll be waiting for yo' call, suh," she said, and I felt the amusement in her voice.

I put the phone back on the cradle, locked up and went down to pick up the Ford. It was a '42 with a '48 engine, and it sang beautifully as I started for the address on the bill.

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The house was in the Bronx, up around the upper two-hundreds. The roads were pock-marked, gravel-strewn. In contrast to these, little brick houses lined the sidewalks with shady lawns and big, old trees out front. I found the number on Bussing Avenue, a big hill that sloped down from 233rd Street. What a spot for sleigh-riding, I thought. I turned the wheels into the curb on the big hill, slammed on the emergency brake, and left it in gear. It was quite a hill, believe me. I stepped out and walked

up the flagstone path to the house; lifted a heavy brass knocker and waited. The shades were drawn, and there was a quiet solemnity about the big brick house.

I lifted and dropped the knocker again.

THE DOOR opened, and a woman's face appeared in the crack. She was blonde, with a little brown showing at the roots. Her eyes were blue, and clear. She had a pouting lower lip, and an upper lip that was a little too thin. To cover this, she ran her lipstick line over onto the flesh. She wet her lips and asked, "Yes?"

Her voice was deep, almost as if she had a bad cold.

"My name is Lamb," I said. "I'm investigating the disappearance of John J. Edgar." I paused. "May I come in?"

She opened the door wide, pulling her housecoat closed over ample breasts and said, "Come in, Mr. Lamb."

The house reminded me of the City Morgue on a rainy night. We walked into the living room, a large room tastefully furnished in Contemporary. Not really expensive stuff, but not installment buying either.

She motioned me to a seat and asked, "Get you something? A drink?"

"Thank you," I said.

"Scotch? Rye?"

"Rye," I said. "And ginger, if you have it."

She brought the drink, pouring a stiff one for herself, and sat down opposite me, crossing her long legs under the silk housecoat. They were nice legs —long, and firm, and the silk moulded them nicely. She tossed off her drink and poured another from the bottle. Then she leaned back in the easy chair, perched a cigarette between her lips, lit it, and blew the smoke across the room at me, her lips forming a little "O."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Lamb?" she asked, and the way she said it she made it sound inviting.

"I realize how you must feel about all this," I began, "and I don't want to ask any questions that will cause more grief..."

"Forget it," she interrupted; "you're wasting your sympathy."

"What?"

"I don't care if they never find the body, Mr. Lamb. Never."

We stared at each other across the room. I sipped a little of my drink, and she blew more smoke at me.

"All I'm interested in is getting the whole thing over with," she continued. "I'd like to get that four-fifty back from Panelli; if they find John, I don't get it."

"You understand that I've been hired to find the body?"

"I understand, sure."

I raised my eyebrows a little, and she caught the look on my face. "Oh, don't worry, G-man," she said. "I'll give you all the help you need; you've got a job to do, I suppose."

"Thanks," I said. I drained the glass and set it down on the coffee table.

"Another?" she asked.

"Thanks, no."

"Okay, then; where shall we begin?" She smiled over at me, and I looked down at her legs again. She wasn't exactly a youngster—somewhere in the late thirties, I guessed. But she was all there, every bit of her. What's more, she knew it.

"Suppose you begin by telling me your name," I said.

"Sure. Louise. Louise Edgar."

"Do you have any idea who would want to steal your husband's body, Mrs. Edgar?"

"Louise will do," she said.

"All right, Louise. Any ideas?"

"Not a one."

"Did he have any enemies, any people who'd do it for a joke, or for revenge?"

"Not that I know of."

I SAT THINKING for a minute. Then I asked, "Did you and your husband...get along well?"

She drew in on her cigarette and let the smoke out through her nose. "No."

"How well did you get along?" I asked.

"Do you want a diagram?" she asked, chuckling a little. I smiled at her and she added, "We've slept in separate rooms for the past year."

I nodded, and she said, "It's a big house, Mr. Lamb; lots of rooms."

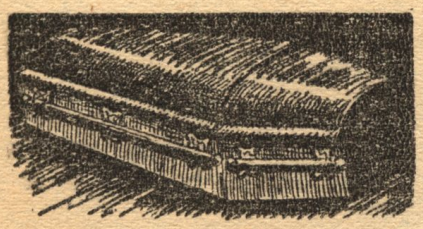
"Do you live here alone?"

She laughed loudly at that one and said, "Far from it. Far from it, believe me."

"Who else lives here?"

"My brother."

"Oh?"



"Would you like to meet him? Maybe he can help you a little too."

She didn't wait for my answer. Instead, she cupped her hand to her mouth and shouted, "Artie! Artie!"

There was a muffled reply from upstairs, and she said, "Will you come down a minute?"

She stood up while she waited for Artie and poured herself another drink. She bent over the table, and her skin was firm and white under the housecoat; I was beginning to like looking at her.

Artie was short, with brown hair and shaggy eyebrows. His eyes were blue, pale blue streaked with a fiberwork of red. There was a faint sneer on his lips, or maybe it was just the natural set of his face. But he looked bored with everything.

Even the clothes he wore, the faded dungarees and the old loafers, looked out of place on him. He was no high-school kid, and he had no right wearing dungarees and loafers—or the crew-cut on top of his head. His face said he should have been wearing a one-button roll and pegged pants, a roll collar and a Windsor knot. And I was willing to bet that's what he did wear when he left the house at night.

"Artie, this is Mr. Lamb," Louise said; "he's trying to find John."

He took my hand, and I squeezed the dead fish on the end of his arm. "Glad to know you, Mr. Lamb."

"I didn't catch your last name," I said.

"Walsh," he said. "Arthur Walsh."

"Nice meeting you, Mr. Walsh," I said, dropping his limp hand.

"Have you had any luck so far?" he asked me.

"I'm just trying to piece together a few things."

"Pour me a drink, will you, Louise?" he said to his sister. "What would you like to know, Mr. Lamb?"

"Do you know any of Mr. Edgar's friends?"

"None. Except his partner."

"Oh, he has a partner?"

"Didn't I tell you?" Louise asked, pouring scotch into a water glass. "Dave Kendall; he and John own a florist shop."

"Where is this shop?" I asked.

"Fifth Avenue," Louise said. "Very classy. On 58th Street."

"I'll have to visit Mr. Kendall," I said. "Anyone else I should know about?"

"Did you tell him about Sandy?" Artie asked his sister.

"Sandy," Louise told me, "is John's sister. She's a model, lives in the village. She used to live here until about six months ago; I'll give you her address if you like."

"I'd like," I said. "Why'd she leave here?"

"Just like that," Artie said. He took the glass of scotch from Louise and poured it down his gullet.

"Well," I said, standing, "if you'll give me your sister-in-law's address, I might as well be moving along."

Louise went to a desk in the foyer and began writing on a slip of paper. Artie and I looked at each other, wondering what to say next.

When Louise gave me the address, I thanked her and said, "I'll let you know if I uncover anything."

She took my hand and squeezed it. "Please do," she said, and I had the distinct impression that there was a slight promise in her eyes. Slight, hell!

Artie opened the door and said, "See you around."

"Sure," I said.

CHAPTER II

I HAD TO park the car all the way over on Eighth Avenue, but it was a nice brisk day and I didn't mind the walk down to Fifth. The florist shop said *Kendedgar Flowers* in gold letters on black marble. A neat blending of Kendall and Edgar, and a very swanky place with glass doors and a big display in the window. I opened one of the doors and stepped inside. It smelled rich—rich with the heavy odor of flowers, and rich with the stink of filthy old money. There was a long, glass-topped table, elbow-high, stretching down the center of the room. A curved desk occupied the space near the window, and there was a plush, modern sofa just reaching to window-level. The rest of the wall-space was covered with refrigerators with glass doors. Inside the refrigerators, a riot of color massed itself in full bloom. Roses—red, white, orange, yellow. Gardenias, orchids, lillies, greens, purples, browns, blacks, every color of the rainbow, flowers I'd seen, and flowers I'd never see again.

A tall man in a blue suit stepped away from the desk and walked briskly toward me. He wore a brilliant white shirt with a button-down collar, the edge of a neat gray monogram showing under the curve of his jacket. He wore be-bop glasses, too, and a bright white smile pasted under his too-long nose. "May I help you, sir?" he asked.

"I'd like to see Mr. Kendall," I said.

The smile came unpasted. "Just a moment, sir; I'll see if he's in."

He walked between two of the refrigerators and opened a door. He was gone a minute, and he came back followed by a fat guy in gray flannels with a white carnation in his buttonhole.

He looked like a floorwalker in a ritzy department store.

"Mr. Kendall?" I asked.

"Yes?" His brows puckered into a frown, his gray eyes looking quizzically at me. The fat on his jowls quivered a little when he talked.

"My name is Lamb. I'm investigating the disappearance of John Edgar."

Kendall reached into his pocket took out a handkerchief, and mopped his brow. "Yes," he said, "terrible business. Terrible."

"I thought you might be able to give me a lead. Anything you overheard, any letters he may have received?"

"No," he said thoughtfully, "nothing that I can think of. Of course, the accident was so sudden. Took us all by surprise."

"Just what happened?" I asked.

"Hit and run, you know," Kendall said mopping his brow again. "Out for a walk. And then it happened. Terrible."

"Automobile?" I asked.

"No one saw," Kendall said; "hit and run, you know."

"What happens to the business now?"

"Partnership," he said. "It dissolves on the death of one partner. But then, you know the law. Mrs. Edgar will probably be willing to settle for John's share in cash."

"And you?"

"I'll be able to use the name, I suppose. We've had the business for many years, you understand. Our name is quite well-known." He mopped his brow again.

"Warm?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," he agreed. "Very warm in here, don't you think?"

"A little," I said. "So the business will be all yours now?"

"After I buy Mrs. Edgar out, I suppose."

"How do you know she's inheriting it?"

He stopped mopping his brow, and his eyes widened. "Well... I don't know. I mean...well...I just assumed. Who else would get his share? I mean, it's only natural, isn't it?"

"I don't know," I said; "he had a sister, didn't he?"

"Sandra, oh yes, Sandra. But a man would leave his business to his wife, wouldn't he?"

"Maybe." I shook hands with Dave Kendall and said, "Well, thanks a lot for..."

"The truck is here, Mr. Kendall," the tall guy with the smile interrupted.

"Oh, excuse me," Kendall said excitedly. "We can only park for a very little time, you know." He shook my hand hastily and said, "Get the orders loaded, Timmy, and don't forget the roses for Mrs. Daniels. The long-stems. And I want an orchid corsage to go up to..."

He didn't even notice when I walked out.

I glanced briefly at the big green truck outside the shop. It was one of those metal jobs with one door at the back that opened. He could fit a hell of a lot of flowers in that truck. Maybe that's why he wore two-hundred dollar suits with carnations in the buttonholes.

Kendedgar, the gold letters on the truck spelled out. A quite well-known name, Kendall had said. Quite. I turned up 58th Street and started west for Eighth Avenue.

I GOT INTO the car and fished in my pocket for the keys. I was about to put the ignition key in the slot when the door next to the curb flew open. I turned, surprised, and a big guy in a plaid sports-jacket shoved into the seat beside me.

The rear door opened at about the same time, and another big joker piled into the back seat. I was about to start kicking when I noticed the automatic the guy in the front seat was holding. He held it just below the dash, out of sight from the sidewalk, but pointed right at my gut.

The guy in the back ran his hand under my jacket and fished out my .45 from the shoulder holster. "Take my money," I cracked, "but spare my life."

"Start driving, Lamb," the loud sports-jacket said.

"Have we met before?" I asked.

"Start driving."

"Where to?"

"Towards the river," the sport-jacket said.

I twisted the key in the ignition and stepped on the starter. I let her warm up for a few seconds, then cut out into the traffic. "What's it all about, boys?" I asked.

They didn't answer, so I shrugged and turned left on the first cross street.

"Just keep heading down toward the docks," the guy in the front seat said. He was holding the .32 in his lap, partly covered with his left hand, still pointed straight at me.

"You ought to put that thing away," I said; "I'm a nervous driver."

"This is fine," the guy said. "Pull in near that factory."

I pulled in to the curb and turned off the ignition. The block was deserted, covered by the back end of the factory building. But it was broad daylight. Surely there would be a cop around. There must be a cop around!

"Okay, boys, now what's the story?" I said cheerfully.

"You're a little too nosey, Lambie Pie," the guy in the back said.

I glanced up into the mirror and took a good look at his face. He had thin black eyebrows that angled over beady black eyes. He might have been good-looking except for his nose; it was smashed all over his face like a Spanish omelet. I was going to remember that face. My name was Lamb,

and not what he seemed to think it was.

"So?" I said. "So I'm nosey."

"So don't be so nosey," the guy in the front said. He was wearing a green fedora. He had a thin, hatchet-like face that looked strange on his burly body. He needed a shave badly, and when he grinned, his teeth were yellowed and rotten.

"Okay," I said, "I won't be nosey. It's been nice meeting you boys, but I..."

My own .45 came down on my shoulder like a sandbag dropped from a ten story building. I reached up with my left hand and grabbed my shoulder as the guy in the front seat slashed his automatic across my face. It hurt; it hurt like hell, and I didn't know which hurt more, my shoulder or my face.

Then the guy in the back seat reached his arm around my neck and held it back, my head tilted to the roof of the car while the guy in the front worked over my gut with his big hands. I don't know how many times he hit me. I stopped counting after three.

The guy next to me pocketed his gun while I leaned over the wheel cradling my stomach and groin. I wanted to vomit, and I wanted to cry, too, but I didn't have the strength to do either.

As a goodbye kiss, the guy with the Spanish omelet nose slapped me across the face, hard, with the butt of my .45 in his palm. Then he dropped the gun into the crack of the back seat, and I heard it thud against the oil can I kept under the seat. He could have laid it right in my lap for all the good it'd have done me. I couldn't have picked up that .45 if it meant my life.

He got out of the car, and they both walked up the street, calm as can be, two gentlemen out for an afternoon stroll.

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IT TOOK a long time for the throbbing pain in my stomach to go away. I don't know how long I sat hunched over the wheel, gulping big breaths of air, the knives slashing across my gut at two minute intervals. The bone in my shoulder ached where my .45 had smashed into it, and I began to wonder if it was broken. Once, I touched my cheek to see if it was bleeding. My hand came away wet and red.

And finally, the knives stopped digging, and I sat up straight, the pain only in my shoulder and cheek now. I tilted the mirror down and looked at the gash across my face where the .32 had scraped across the skin. It was deep and it was messy and it hurt like hell when I touched it.

I sat still for about ten minutes, just looking around, just trying to get up enough strength to start the car and drive to a nice warm bed.

It was then that the prowl car pulled up. The cop was on the side of my car near the wheel, and he couldn't see my cheek, of course. "Sorry, buddy," the cop said. "You can't park here."

I mumbled something about the City's finest under my breath, and started the car up before he said another word.

CHAPTER III

THE CLERK at the desk in my hotel glanced briefly at my cheek and then busied himself finding my key. He also pulled a slip of paper out of my box and read it to me.

"A Miss Edgar called," he said, his eyes glued to the gash on my cheek; "she said you could reach her at this number."

"When was this?"

"About a half hour ago," he said, his eyes growing wider as he examined my cheek more fully.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked.

He took his eyes from my face. "Why no, nothing. Nothing at all."

"Oh," I said. "I thought perhaps you were wondering about the cut on my cheek."

"Cut?" he said. "Oh yes, there does seem to be a cut on your cheek; I hadn't noticed."

"A swordfish," I exclaimed. "Jumped right out of its tank at the Aquarium and cut me to ribbons."

His eyes opened even wider, and I left him that way, with the bugged expression on his face.

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Up in the room, I washed out the cut with peroxide, smeared it with iodine and put a pad and some adhesive over it. Then I took the slip of paper the clerk had given me and sat down to dial the number on it. It rang several times, and then a soft, slightly breathless voice sounded in my ear.

"Hello."

"Hello. May I speak to Miss Edgar, please?"

"This is Miss Edgar."

"Hello," I said. "This is Guthrie Lamb."

"Oh, Mr. Lamb," she said; "I called as soon as Mr. Panelli told me whom he'd hired."

"I was on my way to see you, anyway," I told her.

"Can you come down now?"

"Sure," I said. "Where are you?"

"I'm at the Bernard Studios on Madison and 48th; will you meet me there?"

"Sure. Give me fifteen minutes." I was about to hang up when I remembered. "Hey, how will I know you?"

"I'm dark," she said; "you'll know me."

"Okay. I'll see you later."

I hung up and put on my jacket again. Something felt funny, and it took me a few minutes to realize what it was. My shoulder-holster was empty. I'd forgotten to retrieve my gun from where Spanish omelet had tossed it behind the seat. I shrugged and combed my hair neatly; after all, I was about to meet a strange, dark lady.

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TWENTY minutes later, with my .45 tucked back snugly in the holster, I walked into the Bernard Studios. At first I thought I'd died and was in Heaven. The place was full of models, all carrying portfolios and hatboxes. They all had that frozen look on their faces, the look that comes with too much beauty. They all were built just right, and they all looked as if they'd been stamped out of one delicious, curving mould.

A little guy in a blue beret opened a door, closed it hastily behind him, and started to cross the room. He glanced at me sitting on the couch, raised his eyebrows, then kept right on scurrying across the room like a frightened jack-rabbit. I studied the scenery while I lit up a cigarette. For my part, Sandra Edgar could take all her good, sweet time; I was perfectly happy just sitting here.

Another door opened, and a big redhead in a green bathing suit strutted across the room, her head high. None of the girls in the room seemed interested. I'm always interested, though, so I followed her all the way across the room with my eyes. I don't think I ever enjoyed just sitting still so much in all my life.

And then Sandra Edgar stepped into the room. I knew it was her the minute the door opened. She carried a portfolio like the rest, and a hatbox. But she was as different as they come; after they made her, they threw away the mould.

She was dark all right, dark and smooth in a silky black dress that hugged her body and shimmered as she walked toward me. Her breasts were full and the dress clung to them

precariously. Her hair was black, as black as the Tunnel of Love on a Saturday night. And her eyes were black, too, or a brown so deep that it seemed black. Her skin was dark, a smooth, even olive that was unmarred except by the bright, full, redness of her lips. She was smiling, and she held out her hand as she came over to me. "Mr. Lamb?"

I took her hand, and it was warm and alive, and I forgot for a minute that I was looking for her brother, and that he wasn't so warm or alive. "Sandra?" I asked, because somehow I just couldn't call her Miss Edgar.

"Let's go downstairs," she said softly; "I know a nice place where we can talk."

She took my arm and we didn't say a word while we waited for the elevator. When the doors opened, the elevator boy looked her up and down and I felt a sudden pang of jealousy even though I couldn't very well blame the guy.

THE PLACE she chose was a quiet one, with just a piano playing in the background. The walls were pale blue, and the lighting was indirect. She leaned against the leather of the booth and sipped at her Martini.

Then, abruptly, she put her glass down and leaned close to me. "Have you found anything yet?" she said.

"Nothing much."

"Anything?"

"To be truthful, no."

She leaned back again and a thoughtful frown crossed her forehead. "I wish I could help you; I called you because I want to help."

"Maybe you can. Do you know of anyone who'd do a thing like this? Any practical jokers your brother knew? Anyone who disliked him enough?"

"Nooo," she said slowly. "No, I can't think of anyone; my brother was a swell guy, Mr. Lamb."

"Guthrie."

"I lived at his house when things were going rough, Guthrie. He always treated me fine, always."

"What made you leave?"

"Well, things got better; I've been getting some good assignments, a few covers."

"That's the good reason," I said. "What's the real one?"

She seemed to debate this for a second before she answered me. Then quickly, as if the word burned her tongue, she said, "Artie."

"Artie Walsh?"

"You've met him?"

"Yes," I said. "Mr. Casual of 1952."

"That's him," she said; "he just got a little too casual for comfort."

"Oh?"

"Got so I couldn't take a shower in peace anymore; I just had to get out."

"What's he do for a living, this Walsh?"

"Nothing as far as I know. He gambles a lot. At least, he borrowed quite often from Johnny."

"How often?"

"Often enough. My sister-in-law..." She paused. "Have you met Louise?"

"Yes."

"Well, Louise always pleaded with Johnny to pay Artie's debts. He seemed to lose an awful lot."

"And he didn't work?"

"Not that I know of; he was in with a pretty rough crowd, I think."

"What about Louise and your brother?"

"Nothing. Big fat zero."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. It died a long while back, Guthrie. A shame, too; Johnny cared a great deal for her."

"What killed it?"

"I don't know." She looked at me with those deep brown eyes. "Really, I don't."

"Really?" I asked.

"Kendall, I suppose," she admitted. "I shouldn't keep anything back from you, should I?"

"Not if you want to really help."

"IT WAS Kendall. I guess he's loved Louise for a long time now. And

you know Louise; anything for kicks. She led poor Dave on, and Johnny found them together one night."

"Dave Kendall?" I asked, surprised.

"Funny, isn't it? Especially when Johnny was such a nice-looking man. It wasn't really Dave's fault, of course; Johnny realized that."

"And then what?"

"Johnny just quit, that's all. That's when he and Louise stopped being man and wife, even though they lived under the same roof."

"And Dave?"

"Nothing. Johnny didn't even consider him. I mean, it could have been anyone, you understand; Dave was just a foil."

"How did Dave feel about all this?"

"How could he feel? They were still partners when Johnny was run down, you know."

"What about that? Any clues as to who ran him down?"

"None," she said softly. "None."

I offered her a cigarette and lit it for her. Then I lit my own and thought for a little while. "This Walsh character. Where does he lose all his money?"

"I don't know."

A sudden thought hit me. "By the way," I said as causally as I could, "do all your boyfriends wear plaster on their cheeks?"

She glanced up, and a flush started below her neck and worked its way under the deep olive of her face.

"I didn't want to ask," she said, "I thought it might embarrass you."

I touched the plaster on my cheek and said, "Oh."

Maybe she was telling the truth. Maybe. Or maybe she'd known I'd have a split cheek before she even met me.

"Shall we go?" I asked.

"All right," she said. She covered my hand with hers on the table top. "Please find him, Guthrie. Please."

I promised I'd try. Then I paid the waiter and we left together, her hand warm on my arm, her hips brushing against mine ever so gently, ever so gently.

●

I HAD A good supper, smoked a few cigarettes and drove up to the Bronx again. It was still early, about six-thirty.

I parked the Ford across the street from the Edgars' house, about half way up the block from it. And then I began waiting.

I'd smoked half a pack of cigarettes, and it was nine o'clock by my watch when Walsh finally came out of the house.

Sure as hell, he was wearing a one-button roll and a windsor knot. He walked briskly to a late model Olds parked at the curb, and stepped in. I started up the Ford and waited for him to pull away from the curb. When I'd given him a half-block lead, I got on his tail and stuck to it like a dirty shirt.

He headed for Baychester Avenue, turned right there and headed up the dark, wide street with his brights blazing ahead of him. On Boston Post Road, he made a left and began pouring the gas on. I stayed right behind him, my lights dim, all the way up to Yonkers. He pulled into the curb in front of a plush joint called the *Taj Mahal*. I got out of my car and walked the block to the joint. He'd already gone inside, and I peered through the plate glass front and spotted him standing at the bar.

A Negro band, with the hottest trumpet I'd ever heard, was blasting away inside. I waited until he took a booth near the bandstand and then walked in and stood at the far end of the bar, my back half turned to him.

"Yes, sir?" the bartender asked.

"Rye," I said.

"Water, sir?"

"A little ginger," I told him.

He went to get my drink and the band started *How High the Moon,* with a soft bop piano and a groaning tenor sax. The trumpet man had a cup mute in his horn, and he kept a steady rolling background going. It was sweet, and I forgot for a minute what I'd come for.

What had I come for anyway? As far as I could figure, any one of John J. Edgar's friends or relatives could have taken his body out of sheer spite. Louise certainly hated the guy's guts; she admitted as much. And she wanted that four-fifty back.

Kendall probably *adored* Edgar for catching him with his wife, and he was just fat enough to carry that coffin to Siberia single-handed.

Artie Walsh? He'd borrowed from Edgar; maybe he was sore about having lost a soft touch.

And Sandra—Sandy, the lovely model with the pleading eyes and the velvet skin? Nothing really. Unless publicity would help her career. A corpse didn't disappear every day, and there probably would be a big splash in the papers soon.

So what? Add it all up and what did I have? Nothing.

The only stupid thing about all this was that no-one had a real motive. Nobody but a psycho would steal a body and a coffin unless he had a damn good reason. So who had the reason?

I signalled the bartender and he shuffled over. When he was close enough, I asked, "Where can a guy get a little betting excitement?"

He looked at me sleepily and said, "Come again?"

"A little poker, a wheel maybe, where is it?"

"You've got the wrong joint, pal," he said; "we're strictly social. Strictly."

"Where's the right joint?" I asked.

"I wouldn't know, sir," he said.

Sir. There was only one thing that would make him drop the "sir" mighty fast, and change it to "pal" again. I gave it to him in the palm of his hand, with the numeral five showing.

"Try *The Bucket,*" he whispered, slipping the fin under his apron. "Up the road a piece."

"Thanks," I said. I took a last look at Artie Walsh, and headed out of the *Taj Mahal* as the band went into *Basin Street Blues.* God, they were good!

●

THE BUCKET was short for *The Bucket and Ladle.* It was a small place with a bucket and a spoon done in red neon in the window. I walked straight to the bar and said to the bartender. "Where's the boss?"

He eyed me levelly. "Who wants to know?"

I reached over the bar and grabbed him by the collar. "I do," I snapped. "Now get him and get him fast."

I pushed him away from the bar, and he went off muttering something about, "Tough guy."

But he came back in three minutes with a bald-headed guy chewing on a cigar. He was short and muscular, and there was a merry twinkle in his light blue eyes. "What's the idea mussing up the help?" he asked, chewing on the cigar.

"I want a little information," I said. "Can you give it to me?"

"All depends," he said; "whom do you represent?"

I almost started laughing at this little guy who used the word "whom" with such authority.

"I don't represent the Police, if that's what you're worried about."

"Whom?" he repeated.

"A guy named Panelli. I'm a private detective; Guthrie Lamb."

"Pleasure, Lamb," he said. "They call me Nick."

"Do I get the information?"

"It all depends on..."

"I know you run a wheel and a few

games," I lied; "we'll just skip over that."

He shrugged. "Sure, if you want."

"What do you know about an Artie Walsh?" I asked.

"What about him?"

"I asked first."

"Punk. Small time. Bets every now and then. Made a big killing the week before last."

"How much?"

"Three grand."

I whistled under my breath. "How often does he come in?"

"Every now and then. He splits his time between here and Charlie's."

"Where's that?"

"Down the street." He chewed on the cigar vigorously. "He owe you money, this Walsh?"

"No. When was he in last?"

"Ain't been here since he took us for the three."

"Thanks, Nick," I said.

"Pleasure, Lamb. Drop in again some time."

As I passed the bartender on the way out, I walked up close to him and said, "Boo!"

He was picking up the glasses he dropped when I walked out of the place.

CHARLIE'S was a carbon-copy of *The Bucket*. Except that it was *Charlie's*. Again, I walked to the bar and asked, "Charlie in?"

"Near the juke," the bartender said.

I walked over to where Charlie was standing. He was big, like a football player, with heavy shoulders stretching under an expensive suit. He carried a little moustache under his nose. There was a big onyx ring on his pinky.

"Charlie," I said, "I'd like to talk to you."

"Go on," he answered, "talk."

"Know Artie Walsh?"

He eyed me carefully, two little gray orbs peering into my face. "Sure," he said at last.

"Seen him lately?"

"Nope."

"Ever bet here?"

"Nobody bets here; we run a clean place."

"Sure. Did Artie ever bet here?" I repeated.

"Say, who the hell are you?" Charlie asked.

"Guthrie Lamb. I'm investigating a disappearance."

"Artie's?" Charlie asked.

"Has he disappeared, too?" I wondered out loud.

Charlie's eyes narrowed. "I heard he had an accident," he said.

"Artie Walsh?"

"Yeah. Too bad."

"You don't look too sorry about it."

"He owed us some money; too bad he had the accident before he could pay off."

I didn't quite get it all, but I was willing to listen. "I hear he made a big killing at the *Bucket* a little while ago," I said.

"Yeah?" Charlie acted surprised.

"Yeah," I said.

"That's what I heard too, you know?" Charlie said. "Too bad about his accident."

"Thanks a lot, Charlie," I said.

"So long," he waved.

I walked out and turned back to look at Charlie's full name on the window in small letters. *Charles Rason, Proprietor.*

I was heading back toward the Ford when a car pulled to the curb I happened to get a look at the guy who stepped out.

I'd have recognized that beautiful pan anywhere. It was my friend with the Spanish omelet nose.

CHAPTER IV

HE WAS alone, but he didn't stay that way long. I stepped into his path as soon as he'd closed the car door. My fist wrapped into his collar and I yanked him to-

ward me. "Hello, handsome," I said.

"Hey, what's the big...?"

I yanked him a little closer. "Take a good look, sweetheart. Remember me now?"

He reached under his jacket and I smashed my free fist into his face. He backed against the car, yanking a .38 free from his shoulder and I let him have another one full in the face. I was beginning to understand why his nose looked the way it did.

He started to crumble and I chopped him on the back of the neck with my hand, kicked the .38 into the gutter, and dragged him into the alley alongside Charlie's place. I went through his pockets, in a hurry, found

his wallet and turned it inside out. There was nine hundred dollars in twenties in the zipper compartment. That, and a driver's license with the name Anthony Calli on it; I was putting the wallet back in his pocket when I got another surprise.

"Well, look who's back for another treatment," the voice said. I didn't bother looking up; I knew it would be the guy who had worked me over in the front seat, the guy with the green fedora and the hatchet face. I knew too that he'd have a gun on me, the same .32 that had ripped my cheek open. So instead of looking up, and instead of doing what he probably expected me to do, I kicked out with both feet, my hands behind me on the ground.

He yelled when I connected with his shins and the .32 went off with a big bellow. I pounced on him then, gave him two in the gut to remind him what he'd done to me. He rolled over, scrabbling for his gun, and I kicked him full in the head. He staggered to his feet, cursing blindly, and then I let him have it right from the ground. It landed square on his upper lip, and I felt the shock shoot up my arm clear to the shoulder. He flopped to the sidewalk like a bag of sawdust. I got up, brushed myself off, and then went through his pockets, too.

He was crying seven-hundred and fifty dollars, all in twenties, nicely clipped together with a little gold clip shaped like a dollar sign. I put the money back, and found his name on a YMCA card. Peter Dale.

I left them both in the alleyway and walked back to the Ford. Two punks with sixteen hundred and fifty bucks between them. Something smelled mighty fishy, and I was beginning to figure what it was. There were still a few loose ends, though, and I'd have to do a little more work before I reported back to the mortician named Panelli.

●

I DROVE back to the Bronx and put in a call to Central Homicide. A tired cop answered the switchboard and I asked for Lieutenant Mulrooney.

Mulrooney came on, sounding as if I'd interrupted a hot poker session. I probably had. "Yeah?" he asked. "What is it?"

"Dick?"

"This sounds suspiciously like Guthrie Lamb; what the hell do you want, shamus?"

"Some information."

"Come back tomorrow."

"I need it now, Dick."

"All right, all right, what is it?"

"What do you know about a guy called Charles Rason?"

"Never heard of the bum."

"Check him for me, will you? And two hoods named Anthony Calli and Peter Dale."

"Anything else I can do for you, sir?" Mulrooney asked sarcastically.

"I'll call you back in ten minutes—okay?"

"Make it fifteen."

I hung up and had an egg-cream at the fountain. I suddenly realized I'd have to call on Mrs. Edgar again, and the prospect wasn't exactly a dull one. I called Mulrooney two egg-creams later.

"This is it," he said. "Rason operates a dump called *Charlie's* in Yonkers; the hoods work for him."

"Is that all?"

"Keep your shirt on, Gutnrie. Your damn eyes are the same. Ask a guy for something and then..."

"All right, all right. What else?"

"Rason is connected with a bigger outfit. As far as I know, the local cops can't knock him off because of that."

"This bigger outfit in Yonkers?" I asked.

"You'll never believe it," Mulrooney said; "the syndicate is in Albany."

"Albany?"

"You hard of hearing, Guthrie?"

"Who controls Charlie's wheel?" I asked.

"Albany," Mulrooney said; "you're pretty dull tonight, Guthrie."

"Not any more," I said. "Thanks a lot, Dick; I'll send you a carton of cigarettes."

"Yeah, sure," Mulrooney said.

●

I hung up and drove toward Bussing Avenue again. The lights were still on when I got there, and I lifted the knocker and let it drop softly.

Louise Edgar came to the door, her hair in curlers. She was wearing pajamas, pink, with a peek-a-boo lace top.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," I said.

She wet her lips and looked into my eyes, and I began to get a little idea of what the late John Edgar's problem was like. "Not at all," she said. "Please come in."

"I won't be a minute; I'd just like to know a little more about your husband's accident."

"There's not much to say," Louise shrugged. "It was hit-and-run, you know."

"What time did your husband go for this walk?"

"About ten-thirty, I think it was."

"What time did he usually get home from the shop?"

"It varied. Some nights he closed, and some nights Dave did."

"Who closed the night he had the accident?"

"He did. It was a weekday night. He got home at about nine. I remember he pulled the truck into the driveway while I was reading."

"Which truck?"

"The one from the florist. John generally took it home with him. He sometimes picked up flowers in the morning."

THAT WOULD be the large, green, closed truck I'd seen pull up when I was talking to Dave. A new thought hit me. "Did he leave the truck here all night? I mean, whenever he took it home?"

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"Sure." She paused and came over to sit beside me. "You have an awful lot of questions, Mr. Lamb. Is that all you've got on your mind?"

I glanced from the peek-a-boo to her eyes, and back to the peek-a-boo again. "Does your brother drive?"

"What?" She had rested her hand on my arm, and the fingers were tightening there.

"Artie. Does he drive?"

"Of course." Her eyes narrowed. "Say, you don't think he drove the hit-and..."

"No," I said; "I was thinking of something else."

"Oh."

"Well, I've really got to go, Louise. You've been a big help. Thanks."

"That's no way to thank anybody," she said. She reached over and grabbed the back of my head. Her lips crushed against mine, and they were ripe and full and longing. I pulled away. I didn't mind kissing widows—but not when their husbands weren't even buried yet.

"So long," I said. "Sleep tight."

Then I slammed the door.

●

I called Sandra Edgar at the first candy store I passed.

"Sandra?"

"Yes?"

"This is Guthrie Lamb. I may need your help; can I stop by for you in a few minutes?"

"All right," she said. "What is it, Guthrie? Have you found anything?"

"I'm not sure yet. Will you be ready in forty minutes?"

"Yes, of course."

"I'll tell you all about it then. 'Bye now."

I hung up and headed for the West Side Highway. It took me little more than a half hour to reach the Village. Sandra was waiting in front of the building. She wore a pale green sweater and a black skirt, and her hair was bunched at the back of her neck. She took my hand again and squeezed it.

"Have you really found something?" she asked.

"I hope so. We may be too late; but if not, I may need you for identification."

"Then you've found Johnny."

"I didn't say that," I reminded her.

WE DROVE to Grand Central Station in silence. I was beginning to wonder whether I was right or not.

It all seemed to add up, but there were plenty of places I could be wrong.

It was mostly a lot of guesswork, and a few real leads. But it might pay off, and I'd know in a little while. I hoped I was right about the train. If I wasn't, I'd have to start checking Railway Express, and maybe the private agencies. That would take time, and time was what I needed most.

The old guy in the storeroom peered over his spectacles and let his eyes wander over Sandra's sweater.

"I'm checking on a shipment," I said. "A rather large crate; should have come in sometime yesterday."

"We get lots of large crates, Sonny," he said. "Any idea where it was going?"

"I'm not sure. You might try Albany."

"Did it come in during the night?"

"Yes, it should have."

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Reason I ask is I wouldn't have taken it during the day, you see. I'm only on..."

"What about the crate?"

"I'll check."

The old guy was gone about ten minutes. Sandra held my arm tightly, and chewed on her pretty lip. Lord, she was beautiful.

The old guy shuffled back and said, "Yep, we got it."

"Can I have a look at it?" I asked.

"That's against regulations, Sonny."

I put the ten dollar bill on the counter. "Is this against regulations, too?" I asked.

He looked at the bill and scratched

his head thoughtfuly. "Suppose I could let you have a look at it," he said.

We followed him back into the store room where the trunks, valises, packages, boxes, crates were piled high awaiting shipment. He stopped in front of a long, rectangular crate. "This is it."

I picked up a crowbar and started prying the boards loose.

"Hey now! You can't do that," he shouted.

He was a little late. I'd already found the coffin inside the crate. I pried off the rest of the boards and began turning the screws of the lid.

Sandra gave a little gasp as she stepped over to the crate.

"Shall I open it?" I asked.

She gave a little, frightened nod and I threw back the lid.

It was John Edgar, all right. I'd never seen him, but I recognized the "wax" description Panelli had given me.

Sandra gasped and said, in a little voice, "That's John."

"You're gonna get me in trouble," the old guy protested.

I began going through Edgar's pockets. I hadn't wanted Sandra to identify the body. I wanted her to identify something else I might find.

"Hey now, cut that out," the old guy screamed; "I'll call the police."

I pulled out my .45 and waved it under his nose.

"Quiet, old man," I said, and he suddenly shut up.

I PULLED A wrist watch off Edgar's wrist and handed it to Sandra. Then I began going through the wallet that was in his back pocket.

"Recognize that watch?" I asked her.

She looked at it for a few seconds. Then her eyes widened in surprise.

"Why yes. Yes, it's..."

"It's mine, Lamb," a voice behind us said.

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I knew who it was before I turned; his name was in the wallet I held in my hands.

Artie Walsh was wearing the same one-button roll he'd had on when I left him in the *Taj Mahal*. He was also wearing the latest thing in handwear: a .38 automatic clutched tightly in his right fist.

"I'll take that watch," he said to Sandra. She gave it to him, and he motioned at me with the gun. "Give me that wallet, Lamb, and drop that gun."

"Nice little setup," I said, dropping the .45 to the floor.

"Not bad," Walsh admitted. "Not until now, anyway."

"It looks like you'll have to get three more crates," I said.

"It looks that way, doesn't it?" His eyes shifted to Sandra's sweater, and I remembered what she'd said about taking a shower.

"How much did you pay your two hoodlums?" I asked.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Walsh said calmly.

"Oh, yes you do, now don't you? You won three grand at the *Bucket*, Walsh. You also owed Charlie Pason a pile of money. He heard about the big killing and tried to collect. When you wouldn't pay off, he sent his two hoods out to collect. Only they weren't out to collect money; they were going to bring back a dead Artie Walsh. And Charlie was going to ship the corpse up to Albany, just to be in the clear with the syndicate. Your body would have been payment in full."

"Sounds pretty," Walsh said. "What's the next chapter?"

"The oldest one in the world," I told him. "Money talks, it's called. Out of the three grand, you probably slipped Charlie's hoods one apiece. Then you knocked off Edgar and they fast-talked Charlie into thinking Edgar's body was yours. That's why the face was mashed in, and that's why you stopped playing at the *Bucket* and at *Charlie's*."

"Is that all?" Walsh asked.

"Just a little more. How much money did you owe Edgar?"

"Nothing."

"I'd say plenty. And I'd say you saw an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Cancel Edgar and you cancel your debt to him and your debt to Charlie. And then Louise might possibly inherit Edgar's half of the business, in which case you'd have a soft touch for the rest of your life."

"I still will," Walsh said softly.

"Unless Sandra inherits," I said; "she might, you know."

"Not if she's dead," he said.

"Could you kill her?" I asked. "Could you really kill Sandra?"

He looked over to her then, his eyes moving from her lovely face to the fullness of her sweater. That was all the time I needed.

I made a flying tackle and Walsh dropped to the hard wooden floor. I grabbed his wrist and held it tight, with the gun pointed at the ceiling.

"You louse," I said. "You even used Edgar's truck to drive that crate down here, didn't you? Didn't you?"

"Yes!" he shouted, and he yanked his hand away; "killer" was written all over his face, and he was about to chalk up another victim. But this victim wasn't crossing a lonely street in the Bronx to be knocked down by a fast-riding car. I smashed my fist into his face and I really enjoyed it. Believe me, I loved it. He sank back onto the floor, the gun still unfired.

I got up and picked up my own gun. Carefully, I closed the lid on the coffin.

"Seal up the crate," I told the old man. He was staring at me bug-eyed, about ready to pass out. "And change the address on it. It goes to *Panelli's Funeral Home* in the Bronx."

Sandra came into my arms then, weeping softly. I thought of how happy Panelli the mortician would be when I told him the case was closed.

I smiled then. Not because of Panelli, but because Sandra felt so damned nice there in my arms. So very nice.

●

Fanton weighted the agent's body down with rocks...

I WANT YOU, KILLER!

By Richard Brister

IT WAS ONE of those crummy little so-called summer resorts that was actually nothing but a cluster of unpainted wooden shacks huddled along the bank of the river. Harry Fanton had checked into cottage number 18 ten days ago under the name of William V. Garvey, carrying two suitcases full of cheap-looking sport clothes and a small arsenal, including a Luger and two automatics—just in case the mustache he was growing didn't pull the wool over the eyes of his public.

The fat old guy who owned and operated the joint had looked Fanton over, that first day, and murmured, "You like fishing, Garvey? Plenty of

The bird's song sounded like the opening notes of a popular tune, "Wanting You". And Fanton couldn't stand that tune; that was playing on the radio when he killed that honeymoon couple. But could he risk giving himself away, just to shoot a pesky bird?

nice fat black bass to be taken out of the river around here."

"I'm more at home in back of a shotgun than a fish pole," Fanton had said, grinning a little. "Might try my luck, though."

And he had, partly because it didn't look good—a young guy like him staying too much alone in his cabin. The idea was to work himself in, become a part of the place, make people take him for granted. Then, too, out in a rowboat, he could get a good burn, knock off that pallor. And a guy out fishing could keep away from the crowds, out there in the water; everybody would figure he was just looking for a nice quiet spot to throw his bait in.

Actually, though, it was the bird that made a confirmed nimrod out of him.

He'd heard the bird outside his window when he came awake that first morning. He was a guy who slept light, for good reasons; he came awake in a hurry, and lay there looking up at the crummy plywood with which they'd "finished" the ceiling. The bird was sitting on a branch out there about twenty feet from him and giving out with a trilling song that somehow jabbed a needle in Fanton's frayed nerve ends.

It took him about thirty seconds to figure it out, to analyze what was wrong with him. The damn' bird was singing the first few bars of a currently popular song, singing them over and over without any let-up. And automatically, as the bird gave him the music, Fanton fitted words to it.

"*Wanting you...wanting you... wanting you.*" That was the name of the song. Those were the words for which the bird kept providing a thin, high-pitched and somehow nerve-wracking musical background.

HARRY FANTON lay there, staring up at a flaw in the grain of the plywood ceiling, and the tension was building up in him, but then he shook himself roughly out of the mood that was trying to grip him. "The hell," he said. "I'm not superstitious."

Still, if he had been, it would have been the worst kind of omen. "*Wanting you,*" the bird out there was singing, and those two words had special significance for Fanton. The Feds wanted Fanton, had only recently—since they'd found that agent weighted down with rocks at the bottom of a lake—paid him the tribute of placing him on their list of the ten most wanted men in the country.

And lying there, remembering how he had moved up into that special bracket, he found the bird's appearance outside his window even more symbolic. He was remembering how he had saved his skin, when the G's had closed in on him and Baby Jackson and Skit Turnveirin and the Moll, after that jewel job they'd cased for two months and would have pulled off perfectly—with no hitch anywhere along the line—if the Moll hadn't turned chicken when they'd shot the old man out there at the farm house.

Anyway, Harry Fanton had smelled the heat, before the net closed in around them; he'd beat his way out to the highway and hitched a ride with that pair of young honeymooners in the old Chevvy. And when they'd reached that lonely road leading off to the right, through the woods, Fanton had known what he had to do then.

He'd pulled the automatic out of his pocket and pointed it at the kid in back of the wheel. "Take a look over here, kid," he suggested. And to the girl, as she goggled at the gun and went stiff on the seat between Harry and her brand new young hubby, "Just hold that pretty pose, sister."

"We don't have much money, mister," the kid at the wheel said in a dull voice, his Adam's Apple going up and down like a yo-yo. A disc jockey on the car radio quit blatting; music came softly.

"Brake down. Turn in that dirt road, kid."

"Sure." It was his honeymoon. Naturally he was crazy in love with the

girl, wanting to make like a hero, but scared to, for her sake. He turned in there, and there was no funny business from either of them. Harry could feel them both hating him, though, for interjecting this sour note into what should have been the happiest time in their lives. The cramped little coupe was alive with their hate, and in a way Harry welcomed their hatred.

It made things a little easier for him.

The road got bumpier, skinnier, as the jostled along, farther and farther from the highway. The bushes began to crowd the old Chevvy, scraping along the fenders and windows. "This'll do, kid," Fanton said.

"You want me to stop?"

"I want you to stop."

"Like I said, mister, we're on our honeymoon. But we don't have much. Anyhow, you're welcome to it. And if you want the car—well, I just got married. I wouldn't try nothing foolish; I'm thinking of her."

He had stopped, leaving the motor idling, the radio playing. "Turn off the ignition, kid."

He shot the kid through the head just as the key turned.

The girl screamed. Her right hand darted out, red fingernails clawing at Fanton. The automatic barked viciously once more. The girl slid forward. Her head struck the dashboard; her slender body fell heavily against Fanton's left leg.

He sat there quiet for a moment. "You kids are lucky," he said throatily to nobody who could hear his voice now. "You got all the best part of marriage; now you'll never know none of the headaches."

He dragged them out of there before they could bleed all over the coupe's cushions, dragged them back into a thick clump of bushes, where they'd keep for awhile. He got into the Chevvy and was backing it down the dirt road, looking for a place wide enough to turn around in, when the radio blared out suddenly at him and scared him so bad he almost went in a ditch.

IT WAS THE disc jockey, blatting about his next offering to the listening audience. "*Wanting You*" was the song's title. Harry Fanton swore heartily, and snapped the radio off after listening to the first few introductory bars of the number.

He turned around, drove out to the highway, and the G men never laid a hand on him. The papers raised hell, though, when the kids were discovered. The law snooped around and pieced it together, entirely on conjecture, and came up howling his name, Harry Fanton. Honeymooners cold-bloodedly murdered by one of the nation's most ruthless law-breakers. He was a big boy now; Dillinger and Alvin Karpis would have envied him some of his headlines.

So now he had holed himself up in this riverside vacationers' trap, and the first thing, this bird wakes him up singing the exact same music the radio in the kids' coupe had blared at him, right after he plunked them.

He sat up on the lumpy mattress, squinting out, and saw it was some kind of sparrow. That was as close as he, no Kieran, no "Information, Please" expert, could make it. "Shut up, bird," he suggested.

The bird sang it at him. "*Wanting you...wanting you.*" The bird hadn't heard him; the bird didn't know him, who he was, Harry "Wanted Man" Fanton. He closed his window, fried himself some bacon and eggs on the canned-gas range they provided, and went fishing.

The bird woke him up the next morning. And the next and the next morning. He swore at the bird, tried to ignore it. There were a couple old dames next door, in cottage number one seven, fussy old dames that had come up here from the city for a breath of fresh air and a chance to see what a tree looked like growing natural by itself, without a cement walk running underneath it and a guy picking 'em at Pimlico in its shade on a park bench.

They were the Brown "girls," Edith

and Ethel. They spent the bulk of their time sitting around outside their cottage. They kept worrying crumbs off a loaf of bread, feeding the birds. Their place began to look like a bird sanctuary. Starlings and robins, and blackbirds and thrushes—and that damn' song-sparrow, reminding Harry Fanton that he was wanted.

"Miss Brown," he said to the older one, Edith, "I guess you and your sister like birds."

"Oh, we do, Mr. Garvey," she said. "In the city we always go across to the park in the winter and feed them. After all, somebody has to think of them, and—"

"They're kind of noisy around here. Especially in the mornings."

"Oh, are they bothering you?" she said, frowning.

"I've got insomnia. Never fall asleep till past midnight. Like to sleep as long as I can in the mornings."

"Well, I'm sure, if we're creating a nuisance—"

"I could do without a few of them," said Fanton. "There's one sparrow, goes this way—" he whistled, mimicking the song of the bird that annoyed him "—and kind of gives me the willies."

"Why, yes, I know that one. But that's quite pretty. I shouldn't think you'd object to that particular bird call, Mr. Garvey. How do you explain—"

"I don't," Fanton said. "You mind feedin' them crumbs to the birds somewheres else from now on?"

"Well, goodness, if they're disturbing you that much, I'm sure—"

"Thanks," Fanton said, and turned his back on the woman.

THE SONG SPARROW was right there, Johnny-on-the-spot, the next A.M. Fanton swore and slammed down his window. As he did so, he thought he detected a movement behind the cheap curtains at the window of the cottage next door.

"Get nosey, old woman," he muttered. "Get nosey."

They were not the kind of old women to keep themselves post[illegible] on criminal matters. They were the kind of old dames who would faint away at the sight of a gun; they both wore glasses, and Fanton had no fear of their recognizing him from those lousy half-tones they'd been running in the newspapers.

He was bored with his crummy cottage, bored with his fishing, and he amused himself by indulging in a personality exchange with the old women.

"That bird bothered me again this morning, Miss Brown."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Her thin hands fluttered at him. "We're not feeding them here any more, Mr. Garvey; we've been taking the bread down by the river. So perhaps that particular bird will quit coming around, after a couple more mornings."

"He better," Fanton said heavily, and walked away, leaving her to fill in the rest from her imagination.

The old women did not like him after that, and for two days they took out their resentment toward him by avoiding any contact with him, and by covertly frowning across the way at him from behind their window curtains. He enjoyed being resented. Always he had taken a twisted pleasure in being at odds with people, his ego feeding on conflict, and perhaps it was this trait, more than any other, which had put him in a class with the most celebrated criminals of his time.

He felt somewhat let-down when the Browns' two weeks were up and they went back to the city. The boredom was driving him almost crazy, and yet he had to stay here. A stroke of genius had brought him to this place, where the law would not think to seek him, and he must stay till September.

But the bird still sang at him, mornings, and the boredom gnawed at him, and spending his mornings and afternoons in a rowboat, going through the motions of fishing for river bass, helped to build a controlled fury in him.

One morning, when the bird awakened him from a beautiful dream—he'd been up in the Big Town, giving the night spots a fast whirl with a cute chick, a redhead stacked up like a million, and was about to trundle her back to his apartment—he was so enraged that he yanked the Luger out from under his pillow, sighted down on the bird, and almost risked taking a potshot at it.

He didn't pull the trigger, partly because he was not that good a shot with a pistol, partly because he came fully awake as he aimed and his native caution forced him to put the gun down with a hand that was trembling. "What'sa matter with you, boy?" he scolded himself. "You goin' stirry?"

The bird continued to sing, and he controlled his temper, but he had come within a hair's-breadth of making an idiot of himself, and he was frightened.

He looked out the window. "Okay, bird," he said softly. "I guess it's me or you; and if I was you, I'd buy life insurance."

"Wanting you," the bird trilled. *"Wanting you."* And Harry Fanton was again reminded of those honeymooners in the battered old Chevvy, and of his wanted-man's status. Kill the bird. But how, without attracting undue attention to himself? This could be an interesting problem.

THE PEOPLE who moved into the cottage next door—the one the Brown girls vacated—were no improvement from Fanton's standpoint. There was the father, a burly, moon-faced truck driver; his washed-out, sallow stringbean of a wife; six noisy kids ranging all the way up the age scale to a rather stupid-looking boy of fifteen or sixteen years. There was a mangy gray cat which the kids manhandled all over the yard between games of catch with a sponge ball, but what drew Fanton's attention was an air rifle the older boy kept popping away with at any and every conceivable target.

It didn't go "Bang!" It went "Pfffft!" As a boy, Fanton had owned an air rifle. They would kill birds, he knew, having committed teen-aged mayhem on dozens.

"Now, if I was to go out and buy me one of those beebee guns, and knock off that damn sparrow, first thing in the morning— Hell, why didn't I think of this sooner!"

He drove to the nearest town, located a hardware store, and stood outside, ostensibly studying the hammers and saws and gardening supplies in the display window, but actually casing the clerk talking to a customer inside there. "Bo-Bo" Bartelli, he suddenly remembered, had come his big cropper while trying to buy a shotgun from a hardware store clerk in just this sort of a sleepy burg, and had wound up as canned goods for life. Guys clerking in stores where guns are purveyed to the general public have a tendency to keep up with the crime news; you never can tell when a guy like that is going to put the finger right on you.

He could almost visualize the big, noisy headline: *"Harry Fanton Nabbed Buying Airgun,"* and he winced.

"The hell with it," he said, and walked away.

The kid next door was at the dopey age, slap-happy and forgetful. The next afternoon, around four o'clock, he went down to the river in his swimming trunks, leaving his airgun propped against the shaded side of their cottage. Fanton, who'd returned early from his day's fishing excursion, observed with interest that the gun remained there as dusk fell.

Shortly past midnight he slid over there quietly, grabbed the gun, and returned unobserved to his own cottage. The next morning, he was up a half-hour ahead of the birds, and when his ill-fated companion of these many mornings, the song sparrow, lit in that tree outside his window, Fanton was crouched there with the light gun in his hand, happily waiting.

It was dark yet. The bird trilled

the short refrain that had come to haunt him. *"Wanting you...wanting you."*

"Sing, bird," said Fanton. His window was pulled down just an inch or two short of the bottom, and the gun barrel rested on the sill. Fanton had all the room he required to aim, but the almost completely closed window would muffle the thin noise of compressed air driving the beebee shot toward its feathered target. "Sing while you can, bird," said Fanton, as the light grew steadily better for aiming.

THE TIME came. He sighted down on the bird, careful to squeeze off rather than pull the heavy trigger, for he wanted this one shot to accomplish his purpose. "Pfffft!" went the air gun. The bird jerked with the beebee's impact, went up and back, its wings frantically flapping, then dropped like a stone. Fanton grinned, there at the window. He'd caught the bird with its mouth shut, for a wonder.

Briefly he debated putting the gun back where he'd found it across the way there. He abandoned the notion; too risky. He stuck the gun under the crude rag carpeting in back of the sofa and went back to bed.

Fanton decided not to go fishing; he'd earned himself a day's vacation from sweating it out in the rowboat. About eight o'clock, the dreamer boy over there missed his airgun. Nobody remembered seeing the gun. The old man joined the search for some minutes, bawled the kid out for not taking care of it.

Fanton grinned, listening to the big bohunk light into his slack-mouthed son for not remembering where he'd left the gun. "Give it to him, pal," Fanton said; "mix him up good while you're at it."

They let the cat out of the house awhile later. It was not a bright cat, but it had normal instincts. It located that dead sparrow's carcass without too much waste motion, and tried to sneak under the back stoop with it.

Fanton heard one of the kids—a mat-haired little girl—cry out, "Oh, look, Tingle caught a bird. Come here, Tingle, you bad cat. Drop it. Shame on you."

"Let him have it," the boy said. "It's dead."

The woman stuck her graying head out a window. "You take that bird away from Tingle, Charles. This minute. Bury it somewhere, before he learns bad habits. He's had his breakfast."

The boy maneuvered the embattled gray cat into a corner, and finally got the bird away from him. He was a dopey boy, but not squeamish. He examined the remains of the bird with the detached curiosity of a laboratory dissectionist, and said strangely, "Hey, this is funny. Look, Pop; look what dropped out of him."

"Bury that thing," said his father. "You heard your mother."

"No, but look, it's a beebee. Somebody shot him."

From where he crouched by a window, Harry Fanton saw the father's moon-face set. The man frowned down thoughtfully at the beebee in his son's hand, then glared at his son. "Sure you didn't—"

"No, *sir*. Honest, I never did this, Pop."

"Wait here a minute," the man said. He came across toward Fanton's cottage. Fanton could hear the man's heavy steps on the stoop, then the impact of knuckles striking the door. Fanton took a moment, debating whether or not to arm himself with the Luger under his pillow, then decided against it. He let the man in.

"Oh, hello there," he said. "What's on your mind, friend?"

"Pretty much," the man said, stepping over the threshold. He stared at Fanton. "I'm a simple man and I speak my mind plain. When we moved in over there the fat guy warned us you was a queer one, and we'd best just ignore you."

"You're not speaking plain enough yet," Fanton said.

"I'm about to. There was two old ladies in our cottage before us. Ac-

cordin' to the fat guy that runs this deal up here, you and them old ladies was in some mixup about birds; the way I made it out, you just don't like birds, fella."

"What of it?"

"We found a dead sparrow. Our cat did."

"You're still not speaking too plain, friend."

"The bird had beebee-shot in it. My boy's airgun turned up missing last night. If it's all the same t' you, mister, I'd like to take a look around here."

"Maybe it isn't," Fanton said. He was playing for time now, trying to think. He could feel the sweat starting out on his forehead. He could feel hatred for this moon-faced punk flaming up in him. A truck driver, a tough guy, so he figured. If he had any idea who he was getting tough with, he'd powder out of here in a hurry.

"Isn't what?" said the tough guy.

"All the same to me."

"If you got nothing to hide, you shouldn't put up no objection. If I find the kid's gun in here, pal, I'm goin' to pers'n'ly knock a coupla your teeth in. So maybe you'd like to just fish it out, if it's hid somewheres around here, and save us both trouble.

FANTON stood there, trying to control the steady pounding of his runaway heartbeats. *The punk, the lousy punk!* he thought, his teeth grinding. For two cents he'd plunk the guy and take his chances of muscling out of this dump. He might get away with it.

It was no good. This guy had him. Plunking this guy would bring the G's down on him like hornets, and now he took the only way out, as he saw his situation.

"Okay, pal," he said, grinning sheepishly, making an apologetic whine of his voice, "you're too smart for me. The fat guy was right, what he told you about me. I can't sleep nights, and in the mornings the birds were drivin' me squirrely. Especially this one bird. So when the kid left his airgun out last night, I grabbed it, and this morning I plunked the bird, and then I got kind of scared, about taking the gun back, and—"

"Let's have it."

Feeling pretty much of a fool, Fanton snaked the beebee gun out from under the carpet in back of the sofa and handed it over. "No hard feelings, I hope."

The man lifted the airgun and pointed at Fanton's face. "This thing wouldn't kill you, bud. But it would sure put one of your eyes outta commission if I left go from here... Let's go."

"Where?" Fanton said, hardly believing he'd heard right.

"Too many guys in my shoes let too many guys like you get away with this kind of stuff, pal. Me, I'm kind of different; I believe in lettin' the law decide what to do with your kind of actors."

"You're crazy," snapped Fanton. "Why, you crazy muscle-head, if you think that peashooter can—"

The crazy musclehead pulled the trigger. Something small and hard slapped Fanton in the cheek, and he fell back instinctively, covering his eyes with a forearm. "Okay, Buster," he said savagely, the anger overriding every other consideration, "if you want it, you'll get it."

He turned his back, running toward the bedroom. The man yelled, "I'm warnin' you, mister; don't you try nothing with me, now," and came running after.

Fanton reached his bed, snaked his hand under the pillow, and felt the cold, hard steel muzzle of his Luger. "You hero," he snarled, as the man drove a second beebee into the back of his neck. "You tin-plated hero."

He yanked the Luger out in the open, flipped it around to grab it properly by the stock, and lifted it, firing just as the man managed to get

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Something burst from the door, and landed on Howell. It was Miss Pender, and she was a disheveled bunch of action and fury!

HOT ICE HOUSEWARMING

A WARE & PENDER NOVEL

by Seven Anderton

IF HE HAD worn a Santa Claus suit complete with whiskers, Sergeant Dan Polcher would still have looked like a cop. In thirty years in the St. Louis police department, Polcher had worked his way up from a beat—and he was proud of it. The easy way might have made him a captain. His beefy face was set grimly as he walked along the third floor corridor of a new midtown office building to a door that was lettered simply: *Ware and Pender.*

This was nine o'clock in the morning of the first full day for Steve Ware and Edna Pender in their new offices. Sergeant Polcher pushed the door open, took one step inside and halted. A big hand went up to remove his hat, then jammed it firmly back in place; splendor was not going to awe or divert Dan Polcher.

A red-headed young woman sat at a desk facing the corridor door. The impressive reception room was done in cream and green. The redhead was done in trim business garments and looked neat and efficient—also swell. The lettered block on her desk said she was Grace Mitchell. She smiled.

"Whom did you wish to see?" her cool voice asked.

Sergeant Polcher didn't answer. His angry eyes had found a door at one side of the reception room on which neat gold letters spelled: *Edna Pender, Private.*

Ignoring the redhead, Polcher strode towards the door. Miss Mitchell pushed a button beneath the rim of her desk and there was a click at the door Sergeant Polcher had approached. Polcher grasped the cream plastic knob and exerted power; the door

Dan Polcher should have known better than to try to revoke Miss Pender's pistol permit; that was asking for grief in capital letters. And Edna's "housewarming" case for the Ware & Pender agency involved a bit of housecleaning in Polcher's own bailiwick!

didn't budge. Polcher looked around, scowling. "Is Edna Pender in there?" he snapped.

Miss Mitchell was still smiling. "Yes."

"The door is locked."

"I know; I just locked it. Did you wish to see Miss Pender?"

"I've *got* to," Polcher roared. "Who the hell would *wish* to see that scarecrow? What did you think I was going in for?"

"*I* didn't think you were going in," Miss Mitchell said sweetly: "*you* did. Shall I ask Miss Pender if she wishes to see you?"

Polcher looked as if he was strangling. "She'll damn well see me," he sputtered, "or I'll call some boys with axes. I'm Sergeant Dan Polcher—police."

"And you have a warrant to invade these premises?" Miss Mitchell was not awed, either.

"Tell that gargoyle I'm here," Polcher growled.

Miss Mitchell flipped a switch and spoke into an intercom. "Sergeant Polcher of the police wishes to see you, Miss Pender."

"In five minutes, Miss Mitchell," Edna Pender's voice came from the box.

POLCHER waited five minutes, planted solidly before the locked door in scowling silence. Then from the box, "I'll see Sergeant Polcher now, Miss Mitchell."

Miss Mitchell's hand went beneath the desk and again there was a click at the door. Polcher barged through it before Miss Mitchell could speak. Edna Pender sat at a massive desk in a large light office furnished to impress; she met Polcher's furious gaze calmly. "Good morning, Sergeant," she greeted. "How do you like our new quarters?"

"Trick doors," Polcher snorted, "and highfaluting jiggery pokery ain't going to get you anything. Next time I want in the door will be open or I'll bring it in with me."

"Do you supply my income?" Miss Pender inquired. Then before Polcher could reply, "But I kick in for yours. Want to see my tax—"

"No, but I—"

"I advise you to be careful how you approach the boss."

"I don't want your advice," Polcher barked; "where's your gun?"

"In my purse. Why?"

"I want it—and your permit."

"Has my permit been canceled?"

"No. I want you to surrender it."

"People in hell want water," Miss Pender observed. "I need that gun in my business."

"You won't have any business," Polcher retorted, "if you give me any more run-around. I told Steve Ware when he got mixed up with you that he wouldn't have a license very long."

Miss Pender punched a button and spoke into her intercom. "Steve, you'd better come in here."

"Hello, Dan," Steve Ware said as he entered a few moments later. "Something up?"

"Your number is up," Polcher growled, "unless you can talk some sense into this—this—"

"This bullhead," Miss Pender cut in, "wants to take away my gun and permit; he's making threats about our license."

Steve Ware draped his long lean body on the corner of Miss Pender's desk and smiled at Polcher. "Sit down, Dan," he invited. "What's all the row?"

Polcher snorted. "That hell-cat," he jerked a thumb at Edna, "can't go around shooting holes in people, just because they won't answer questions."

"I didn't shoot any holes in that baby-snatching goon," Miss Pender snapped: "I just nicked him in a couple of places. He didn't even bleed much. But he talked."

"Who wouldn't," Polcher grunted, "with a crazy she-nightmare, wearing

Miss Edna Pender

nothing but a pair of wet panties, blazing away at him with a gun?"

Miss Pender sniffed. "I suppose you prefer bright lights and a rubber hose. My way was a lot less brutal—and much quicker. The rats had that baby doped and starving; we had to know who it belonged to."

POLCHER TURNED to the other member of the firm. "Look, Steve, she's a menace to the public—even without a gun. It's only a month since she damn near killed a cop with a rock in her handbag. I want her gun and permit, and if I don't get them I'll keep punching until I get your license. Then what will you do with this grand layout and that sassy redhead to lock its trick doors?"

"Now you listen, lunkhead," Miss Pender flared. "This firm is eleven days old. In that time we have nabbed a gang of robbers that all the cops in the country had been hunting for six weeks. We found a kidnaped baby for one family and recovered a hundred grand in ransom money taken from them and four other families—besides handing you the gang that had been preying on them. Those families are prominent; they swing a lot of weight in this town. And we have a letter from the FBI that is quite a testimonial.

"Also have you read the papers lately? What do you think will happen if I tell the newspaper gang that you want my gun and permit, because I shot a couple of little pieces off a baby-snatching baboon? Go ahead; start something—and see what kind of a finish I put on it."

"So you made a splash," Polcher retorted, "grabbed a lot of boodle and newspaper space and moved out of Ware's rat hole on Pine street. So the goofy public thinks you are smarter than the whole police department and the brass-hats are shying t revoking your gun permit. But we'll see—"

"Listen, Polcher," Miss Pender leaned across her desk. "You and a lot of other cops don't like me; cops have deviled me since I was a kid on your beat. If I had a doll face and fan dancer's shape, it would have been different. But you're through pushing me around. I've worked a long time to get where I could put a stop to it—and I'm going to stay there. I can not only lock my office door, but I can get an injunction to keep cops out of this suite. And I may do that. I *am* a better detective than the mugs in the department—and that burns you. I'm through talking to you. We need a case as a house-warming for our new offices and I'm going out to dig one up."

Miss Pender rose, snatched a hat from a tree and was out of the office while still putting it on. Polcher's eyes came back to Steve Ware. "By gawd,"

he declared, "there ought to be a law against a female being that ugly."

"Did you ever see her smile?" Steve asked.

"No, but I've heard her swear. I had to look some of the words up; they were lulus. Look, Steve, why don't you cut loose from that wildcat while your credit is still good?"

Steve smiled and shook his head. "Not for a million," he declared. "I spent five years gumshoeing for peanuts in this town. Then the gal came along and pulled me out of the doldrums. In ten days she has made me dough-heavy, and I'm enjoying myself for the first time since I left Army Intelligence. Life has spice again—like right now. Only the good Lord knows what she'll come up with for a housewarming, but she said we were not going to be in these offices twenty-four hours without a case; I'm betting that she makes it stick. Come over to my office; I've got good cigars and bourbon. Let's you and me keep on being friends."

Sergeant Polcher was somewhat mollified when he departed fifteen minutes later, but he glowered at Miss Mitchell as he passed her desk. The redhead gave him a bright smile.

WHEN POLCHER had gone Steve buzzed Miss Mitchell. "Leave the door open in case a client should pop in," he told her. "And sit down. How long have you known Miss Pender?"

"Since we were kids," Miss Mitchell replied.

"Tell me about her."

"She's my favorite person."

Steve grinned. "I haven't known her three weeks yet," he said, "but she's mine, too. How come she's been in St. Louis all these years and I missed her until now?"

Grace Mitchell smiled. "You probably didn't look in the right places. Ask Edna anything personal you want t know; she'll tell you—if she wants you to know."

"Where did she get you?"

"I was working in the office at Purina Mills."

"And you quit to come here. Why?"

"Because Edna said she needed me. Any time she needs me she gets me; I'll scrub the floors if she wants me to."

"Why? That's the sort of thing I want to know. She has the damnedest assortment of friends. So far, I've learned about a burglar who gave her his household goods when he was forced to take it on the lam out of a house that he rented from her; a darky family that lives in a houseboat that she owns—and now you."

Grace laughed. "You've seen nothing yet. I'll tell you about us; anything else you'll have to get from Edna, if you can."

Steve filled his pipe. Miss Mitchell took a cigaret from a box on his desk and lighted it with her pocket lighter.

"When we were sixteen," Miss Mitchell began, "I left home—if you want to call it that—because my stepfather was making passes at me. Edna was living in a little room over a tin shop on Broadway and she took me in. She was working in the kitchen of a hash house on Market street and she got me on as a waitress. I worked three days before one of the bosses cornered me in the pantry. Edna had been keeping her eyes open and she crowned the guy with a frying pan. We were fired, but Edna said two weeks' pay for both of us instead of notice; we got it after Edna mentioned cops and assaulting a minor."

Steve nodded. "Sounds like her."

"When we got home," Miss Mitchell went on, "Edna gave me the money and said, 'Grace, you go to business school and learn to hold down a good job among decent people. I'll pay your way and you can do something for me sometime.' So Edna kept me up for two years, and all I've done so far is pay back the money. She even squawked when I added room rent to the debt. Said she had to rent the room anyhow. That's why if Edna wants me she gets me. And there are

a lot of others in this town the same way: Edna is a born champion of the underdog—unless he's a crook. And she won't take anybody's word for that, especially cops. She hates most cops and all crooks with equal fervor."

"What's behind her grudge at cops?"

"She has a way of being where trouble breaks out, and the police have given her some pretty rough times. She—"

STEVE'S telephone rang. It was the one with the unlisted number. Steve answered.

"Steve," Miss Pender's voice came over the wire; "you remember the Solomon jewel robbery more than two years ago?"

"Yes."

"Get busy and dig up all the facts, big and little—especially covering the time from the robbery until the cops killed Smoky Arnold and took Arlene Arnold to jail."

"I take it we have a case," Steve said.

"You might not call it a case, but I'm so damn mad that I'm going to make one out of it. Get busy and round up those facts. I'll see you in the office about three this afternoon."

"I'm on my way," Steve said.

"Tell Grace to stay in the office until one of us comes in," Miss Pender concluded. "And call the office if you can't get back by three; I'll do the same." The connection broke.

Steve cradled his phone and delivered Miss Pender's message. "So it looks like the galleys slave will eat lunch at the oars," he added.

"I'll fast if Edna—"

Steve chucked. "I know," he cut her off; "I could use some friends as loyal."

"Might be," she countered, "you could do more to deserve them. Odd thing, but Edna has made collecting them pay. Some time I'll tell you about Chris Stathias, but I think you have something to do right now."

"Right," Steve said. "Gather the facts on the Solomon jewel robbery and the killing of Smoky Arnold. Do you remember that case?"

"Yes. There was something about it in the *Post Dispatch* a week ago. It said Arlene Arnold was to be released from prison in about two weeks. Edna and I knew Arlene long before she met Smoky and went dippy over the louse; she wasn't a bad kid before that."

Steve rose. "Then I start by reading clippings at the *Post Dispatch*. My partner says she's making a case out of it. From past experience, it won't be monotonous."

CHAPTER II

STEVE GOT back to the office shortly after two. Edna Pender was there. She looked grim—and on Miss Pender that was quite a look. "Did you get the facts?" she asked as Steve sat down in her clients' chair.

"I combed the clippings in the P.D. files," Steve told her, "then went down and talked to Polcher at headquarters. I smoothed Dan's feathers down this morning. He still wants you disarmed and he thinks there ought to be a law about your looks." Steve grinned.

"I hate to agree with Polcher," Miss Pender said, "but so do I." Then she smiled.

Steve forgot everything else in watching the smile. Miss Pender certainly had the most unfortunate face that ever grew on a woman, but her infrequent smile brought about a major miracle with the job lot of mismatched features. It was like an optical illusion, producing something that was almost—or perhaps more than—beauty.

"Why don't you smile at Polcher?" Steve asked.

"I'd laugh out loud at him," Miss Pender replied, "if he didn't make me so damn mad. He wants my gun! Fat chance; before I get through I'm going to curl his hair, but tight. Give me the

story of the Solomon jewel robbery, as on the record, while I do some comparing."

Steve glanced at the top sheet of the penciled notes he had laid on the desk.

"Smoky Arnold," he said, "held up the Solomons as they stepped from their car in the driveway of their home; Mrs. Solomon had worn $180,000 worth of jewelry to a charity shindig. Smoky made her drop it into a cloth sack, then he pocketed the sack and ran across the grounds towards a car he had parked. But it wasn't Smoky's night. The Solomon chauffeur had a gun in the car; he snapped a couple of shots after Smoky. A prowl car came along just then. The cops heard the shots and saw Smoky break from the shrubbery and dive into his car. They gave chase, as the saying goes; artillery was unlimbered and went bang-bang frequently while the cars covered several miles.

"On lower Washington, with the prowl cops still close behind, Smoky abandoned his chariot and ran into an arcade leading through to Olive street. Ill luck was still at his shoulder; the arcade should have been deserted at that hour, but Lieutenant Brad Howell of homicide happened to be cutting through it to get to his parked car. Smoky ran smack into Howell and clipped him before the lieutenant could gather his wits. Howell went down, but not out; he got to his knees in time to blast once as Smoky dashed into Olive street.

"The cops from the prowl car came panting on Smoky's trail and Howell joined them. Smoky was bleeding and limping and they never lost sight of him until he went to earth in the apartment. The cops went right on in bang-banging. Patrolman George Seecord got a slug in the shoulder. Then Smoky was dead."

"Now we come to the frameup on Arlene Arnold," Edna said. "I want every bit of that—the way the cops gave it out."

"So the nasty old cops framed little Arlene?" Steve chuckled.

"They did," Miss Pender said crisply. "Smoky got what he deserved, although I have little sympathy for a fat old woman who has nothing better to do with $180,000 than sparkle; and the jewelry was insured anyhow. But give me the cops' side of it. I *have* sympathy for Arlene."

"She needs sympathy?" Steve asked.

"I'll talk later," Miss Pender said; "give me the alleged facts."

"THE GEMS," Steve obliged, "were not on the deceased person of the late lamented Arnold. Smoky had not been out of sight, nor had he stopped running from cops, from the moment he took the stuff until he made the apartment with the cops right on his heels. He was alone with Arlene during the two minutes it took the law to break down the door. The cops found Arlene in the bedroom to which she had fled when the door caved; she denied any knowledge of the loot. Matrons at headquarters found nothing on her, the cops took the apartment apart without finding one little sparkler. So there had been some fast and slick jiggery pokery—and little Arlene was the only living person who knew what had become of the swag. Which is all—except that the stuff has never turned up."

Edna glared at him. "Didn't you get the facts on what happened to Arlene?"

"Arlene," Steve said, "maintained her ignorance of the whereabouts of the jewels and drew two years for harboring a fugitive. She served it all and was released day before yesterday. From here on I got it from Polcher. Arlene was trailed from Jeff City by the law—escorted, in fact, at her own request, because she was afraid of

something or somebody. She went to the Maryland Hotel, from which it seems she knew an obscure exit. Anyhow, she did a Houdini and lost the minions of the law; her whereabouts is now unknown, and it is supposed that she has had a reunion with the Solomon loot. As they say in detective fiction, the dragnet is out."

"Her whereabouts is not unknown to me," Miss Pender said. "I happened to see her slipping into a little food store on Eighteenth Street. I've known her a long time and she was glad to see me. She has read in the papers about our last two cases; she begged me for help—and she's going to get it."

"Mmm," Steve said. "Let's see... wasn't it harboring a fugitive that sent Arlene to the big house? Polcher would be very happy—"

"I am not harboring a fugitive," Miss Pender snapped. "Arlene served her time—all of it. She is not on parole, and where she is is no business of the police. There is no law against—"

"There is a little thing," Steve cut in, "called possession of stolen property. A jolt in the jug didn't give Arlene a title to—"

"Keep still and let me tell you what really happened," Miss Pender cut him off. "I've just had a long talk with Arlene. She knows nothing about that Solomon loot; she never did."

Steve shook his head. "The police know better. They—"

"They *think* they do. Are you going to listen to what really happened?"

"I'm listening."

"THE COPS worked on Arlene and she told them the truth—but cops seldom believe the truth, or tell it. Then that shyster, Clyde Benedict, showed up as Arlene's attorney. Big Tom Borden sent him; Smoky was one of the Borden mob. Benedict wanted Arlene to tell him where the jewels were and Arlene let him think she knew, because she wanted him to work to get her out of there. You can't blame her for that. But she said flatly that she was going to have her share before anybody else realized on those gems. She had to do that, to keep them from finding out that she knew nothing about the loot and dropping her defense. But Big Tom got sore because she wouldn't cough up what she couldn't, and told Benedict to let the cops have her. Two years! Harboring a fugitive, just because her rat of a husband ran home when the going got tough. Nuts!"

"You are ignoring an important point, my little whirlwind," Steve said; "the facts prove that nobody else can possibly know what became of the loot."

Miss Pender sniffed. "You sound like a cop. No facts prove that Arlene knows. Listen to the rest of it: As soon as she landed in the pen, the cops were up to see her. They told her they knew that she knew where the loot was because a stoolie had told them word was around the joints that she was holding out for all of it. They offered her a deal, including a bench parole, if she would give it up. Arlene told them to go jump in the lake. The reason for that was that a matron, no less, had told Arlene that five hundred bucks had been placed to her account, and that she would be well taken care of when she got out."

"That doesn't make Arlene look innocent to me," Steve said.

"Wait," Miss Pender went on. "This matron told Arlene that all the party wanted to know was that the stuff was safe. Now Arlene had to do some fast thinking. She knew nothing about the jewels, but she could see that she was going to be better off if somebody continued to think she did. So she told the matron to pass the word that the stuff was safe; it worked. Arlene had it pretty good in the coop, with money to use in the right places. And she was offered a parole the first minute it was legal."

"But she did the whole stretch," Steve said.

"Yes; she told them she would accept a pardon, but that she would

leave that joint a free woman or not at all. She wasn't going to be wet-nursed by any parole officer."

"What made her like that?" Steve asked.

"She intended to take it on the lam when she got out," Miss Pender answered. "She had begun to be afraid of what the person who had sent the money might do when she got out and couldn't produce the swag."

Steve smiled. "The web *was* sort of tangled—if Arlene's yarn is true."

"It's true," Miss Pender declared. "I know Arlene. And she *is* in a mess; somebody tried to kill her the night before last—the first night she was free."

"The hell they did!"

"HERE'S HOW it happened," Miss Pender said "and there's something very unkosher about it. Arlene had made friends with the prison chaplain. She explained to him that she wanted to be released without anybody knowing about it—and told him why. The sky-pilot promised to arrange it and told her he had done so; a phony story on her release-date was even given to the papers and she was let out ten days earlier. But the St. Louis cops were waiting at the prison when she was dressed out. She asked the chaplain to come to St. Louis with her and he did, but the cops stayed right along."

"Why did she come back to St. Louis," Steve asked, "if she wanted to do a fade-out?"

"She had no money," Miss Pender replied, "and something smells about that. After I tell you about the attempt to kill her, I'll tell you what happened about the dough; there's a lot of hanky-panky in this thing."

Steve chuckled. Unearthing hanky-panky seemed to be Miss Pender's specialty.

"Arlene went to the Maryland Hotel," Edna went on, "because she had once worked there and knew a way to sneak out. She planned to ditch everybody there. She got a room, told the chaplain goodbye and went upstairs; she had refused to talk to the cops, but one camped in the lobby."

Steve grinned. "Nasty old cops."

"Arlene waited in her room until nearly midnight," Miss Pender continued, "before she made her break. And when she stepped from a little service door into the alley—bang! The bullet grazed her side, pretty deep. I put a new dressing on it for her a while ago. Arlene fell by some garbage cans and a second shot hit the cans. Then a sanitation truck turned into the alley and the man with the gun ran. By the lights of the truck, Arlene caught a glimpse of him, but only a glimpse; he was big."

"But why," Steve asked, "would anybody want to burn her down?"

"The answer to that," Miss Pender said, "is what we have to dig up. Didn't your friend Polcher mention the shooting in the Maryland alley on the night Arlene got away from them?"

Steve shook his head. "Maybe the cops tried to kill her," he said dryly.

"Nuts," Miss Pender snapped. "How could a dead woman lead them to the Solomon loot! That's what they want."

"Tell me why she came back to St. Louis," Steve said. "There might be an answer in that."

"SMOKY ARNOLD," Miss Pender told him, "owned a cabin on a small bit of land out beyond Creve Coeur Lake. Arlene got to thinking that the place was probably hers, since Smoky was dead. She thought she might be able to sell it when she got out, so she had the chaplain make inquiries about it. He had a lawyer do the checking and learned that Smoky had died intestate. His estate—there was only the cabin property—would

have gone to Arlene, but the insurance company has it tied up in some sort of legal tape. We may look into that. Anyhow, soon after Arlene asked about the cabin, whoever had been sending money to her cut it off; her last five months in the pen got tough. The slimy matron wouldn't talk to her any more."

"We could check on where that money came from," Steve said, "but what's the rest of it?"

"Arlene knew she would have a court fight for the cabin," Miss Pender explained, "but she came back to St. Louis because there was a man here she believed might help her. He is from a good family and was in love with Arlene before Smoky came along. He got word to her after the trial that she would find him waiting whenever she wanted him. After she got away the other night, she tried to get in touch with him and—"

"Why didn't she try from prison?"

"Only relatives may correspond," Miss Pender replied, "and Arlene has none; also she didn't want to involve the man in anything scummy."

"Did she find him?"

"He's in Korea. And now that poor kid is hiding out in a dump of a rooming house with the cops and somebody else who wants to kill her looking for her. She has seventeen dollars, and a bullet wound, and doesn't even dare come out to make a try to cash in on the cabin. I think that's where we go first—to have a look at that cabin. Arlene drew a map for me."

"I'll lay you a bet," Steve said, "that you have a police tail from here on. Polcher is no fool; he has guessed from my questions that you are in touch with Arlene. He probably thinks you had a hand in her fade-out."

"I don't give a damn what Polcher thinks."

"Why do we go to the cabin?" Steve asked. "Smoky couldn't possibly have hidden the jewels there."

"I'm looking for a lead to whoever is trying to kill Arlene," Miss Pender said. "Forget the jewels until they pop up. I've told Arlene to stay strictly undercover; I'll take food to her. Right now, let's drive to Creve Coeur and have a look at that cabin."

CHAPTER III

THEY WENT in Miss Pender's glittering new Buick and an official car followed. Steve called the shadow to Miss Pender's attention as they rolled out Washington.

"I saw them," she said. "We are going to stop at Chris Stathias' place on Taylor. We'll sit at the bar and I'll have Chris put his car at the kitchen door; we'll lose the lice."

Steve grinned. "You'll strain my friendship with Polcher."

"Who cares?" Edna snapped as she turned the Buick down Taylor. She parked before Chris Stathias' grill and tavern, and she and Steve went inside. Before they were more than settled on bar stools, the stocky Greek proprietor popped from his office and came beaming. "Miss Pender," he exclaimed. "I have read about you in the papers. I thought you had forgotten Chris."

Miss Pender gave him her best smile. "You know better," she told him; "this is my partner, Steve Ware."

Stathias extended a hand. "You are lucky, Mr. Ware. Such a partner."

Steve smiled and shook the hand.

"We are being followed by cops, Chris," Miss Pender said, "and we want to lose them. Where is your car?"

"Is parked behind," Stathias replied.

"Go out and put the key in it," Miss Pender said. "Put the car in the alley, headed towards Delmar, and leave the motor running. Then flag us from the kitchen door."

Stathias didn't even raise an eyebrow. Without a word, he started toward the kitchen's swinging doors.

"The gendarmes," Steve said, looking towards the front, "are parked

acrosss the street; they can probably see us."

"We'll move over towards the booths," Miss Pender said, "when Chris gives the nod, then fast through the kitchen. I doubt they'll see us. Anyhow the cops are headed towards Olive and there isn't room for a quick U turn in Taylor."

THE STRATEGY worked. A few minutes later, the partners were speeding out Delmar in Chris Stathias' Studebaker with Miss Pender driving. There was no tail on them.

"What," Steve asked, "have you got on Chris Stathias?"

"Chris is my friend."

"How many friends have you got who will stick out their necks to help you bamboozle the police—and loan autos for the job?"

"Plenty," Miss Pender replied as she swung the car into a cross street to confuse the trail, "but not all of them have cars to lend."

After some artful dodging by Miss Pender they were on the Olive Street Road. "How are we going to get into this cabin?" Steve asked.

"We will cross that bridge," Miss Pender replied, "after we have burned it behind us."

Steve chuckled. "Ain't we got fun? Also, for a change, we have a client. If only I could smell a fee, life would be rosy."

"Fee or no fee," Mis Pender declared, "I'm going to get Arlene out of this mess. But that swag is still around. I called the insurance agent; ten percent for recovery."

"I know," Steve said. "So do all the other private ops and the police. They've all been on it for two years."

Miss Pender shrugged. "And just waiting for Arlene to get out and lead them to it. The cops got the jump by conniving to keep the time of her release secret, but somebody else got wise. We've got to find out whom."

"And why they want to rub her out," Steve added. "That's odd; how could they get hold of the stuff that way?"

"I think," Miss Pender said, "that somebody has it, but can't peddle it while Arlene is alive."

"That," Steve retorted, "makes it that your friend, Arlene, knows something."

"She doesn't," Miss Pender declared. "So that makes it that somebody thinks she knows something which she really doesn't. Or, perhaps the marketing of the stuff—or producing it for the reward—would tip off something to Arlene. We're almost to the cabin; maybe we'll get a clue to the hokus-pokus there."

The small rustic cabin stood among trees on some three acres in a small shallow ravine. A graveled road in need of more gravel led to it. It was boarded up as to windows; tall grass surrounded it. There was no sign of life. Miss Pender parked the Studebaker.

"Well?" Steve said.

"We'll look it over," Edna said. "If it will make you happy, I have Arlene's written permission to break in; she is still as much owner as the insurance company."

Steve grinned. "A technicality. I suppose you wouldn't break in without permission?"

"Come on," Miss Pender said crisply as she got out of the car. "I've got some skeleton keys to try."

Steve followed to the stout-looking front door. Miss Pender had produced a small bunch of slender keys from her shoulder bag. The second one he tried worked, and Steve pushed open the door; Miss Pender was at his shoulder.

"What the hell are you doing here?" an angry voice demanded from inside the cabin.

THE SMALL front room, except for light through the cracks between window boards, had been dark until the door was opened. By the still scant light the partners saw a man standing before a chair from which he

had risen. He was covering them with a police positive.

"Lieutenant Howell!" Steve Ware exclaimed. "What goes on?"

"It *was* a stakeout," the detective lieutenant snarled, "until you came bungling in. What's the big idea? That Arnold dame ducked the tail we had on her; we thought she might show up here."

"Well," Miss Pender said, "she won't. You can go crawl back under your rock. I know where Arlene Arnold is—and she's not going to be deviled by cops."

"I suppose," the detective sneered, "you also know where the Solomon jewels are."

"No," Miss Pender retorted, "but I'll probably find them."

Steve had been looking about the room. The place had been wrecked, even to walls and the hearth of a small fireplace. "What hit this dump," he asked, "a cyclone?"

"Somebody took it apart," Howell replied, "probably hunting Smoky Arnold's swag. But his moll didn't know that, so there was a chance she would turn up here."

"Arlene was not Smoky's moll," Miss Pender said hotly. "She was his wife—by God and by law, worse luck for her. And you damned cops are pestering her instead of protecting her as you should be. I don't suppose—"

"How the hell can we protect her when we can't find her?" Lieutenant Howell cut in. "And protect her from what?"

"Some ape who is trying to kill her," Edna replied. "But of course you wouldn't know anything about that. Ware and Pender have taken on the job, so you can stop worrying."

"Where did you get a key to this place?" Howell demanded; "it is under the jurisdiction of the courts."

"I got the key from Arlene," Miss Pender lied brazenly, "and try to make something of that. I just wish you would. There's a pretty fair lawyer ready to tie some knots in your tail. I'm paying him, anyhow; I'd like to see him earn part of it."

Howell glared at her. "Crow while you can, sister," he told her. "You're headed for a fall—flat on your ugly puss."

"One good thing," Miss Pender shot back, "it can't be damaged. Come on, Steve; this place is no good to us now."

●

They were on their way back to town when Steve said, "We might as well have looked the place over while we were there; we've just wasted Chris Stathias' gas."

"I don't think so," Miss Pender differed. "I learned all I wanted to know, but I'll keep it to myself a while. You are too friendly with cops—especially Dan Polcher."

Steve chuckled. "I should grumble," he said. "You do all the work and I get rich watching the fun. What do we do next?"

"Take this heap back to Chris and pick up mine."

●

THEY PARKED the Studebaker in the rear and went into the tavern where they found Chris Stathias grinning all over.

"Those cops," the Greek told them, "they were not happy. They came in and asked for you. I told them you borrowed my car and drove away. They were very mad; they ask where you go, and I say you do not say. They ask why you go by the back door and I say that is where my car she is. They say I am a damned crook and I say as long as nobody think so but cops, and Miss Pender is my friend, I will get along. So they go out and look into your car and then go away."

Miss Pender threw her arms about Stathias and kissed his round red cheek. "Chris," she declared, "you are a darling. I should find a prettier girl to kiss you."

The Greek patted her shoulder.

"Your kiss," he declared, "I would rather have—and it is safer. Mama Stathias does not mind."

Miss Pender laughed. "How is Mama Stathias?"

"She is fine. You and Mr. Ware must stay now and eat with old Chris; tonight is roast duck with curried rice."

Miss Pender glanced at her watch. "Yum," she said, "my arm is twisted, but Mr. Ware doesn't have to eat with me."

"You 'Mister Ware' me again," Steve said, "and you won't be able to eat; where do we sit?"

"Chris will show you. I'm going to the telephone; I want to catch Grace Mitchell before she leaves."

●

There was a twinkle in Miss Pender's eye when she came through an arch to join Steve at a table in the dining room.

"Eat slowly," she said. "Your friend, Polcher, is waiting for us at the office. He told Grace he would see us, or we'd never come to the office again; it would be fun to starve him out if we had time."

"We could take a vacation," Steve offered.

Miss Pender shook her head. "Our night-man telephoned that he can't start until tomorrow night, so Grace is going to sleep on the couch in my office tonight. She'll have enough of Dan Polcher by the time we get there. I just want to make him miss his dinner."

Chris Stathias waited on them himself and they enjoyed a wonderful dinner. On the way to the office in the Buick, Miss Pender drove in silence, eyes narrowed and mouth set firmly.

"I've seen you look like this a couple of times," Steve observed, "and both times feathers flew."

"I think some more are going to fly," she said. "As soon as we are rid of Polcher, I'm going to have another talk with Arlene. I want you to stay at the office until I've had it."

●

Sergeant Polcher was sitting grim and determined on a bench in the elegant reception room when the partners entered. It was a quarter of seven. Miss Mitchell winked at Miss Pender.

"I want to know where Arlene is," Polcher barked as he came to his feet, "and I want to know right now."

"My, my," Miss Pender said. "You always want something when you come here. Last time it was my gun and—"

"Where is the Arnold dame?" Polcher almost yelled.

"In seclusion," Edna replied.

Polcher was rapidly turning purple. "I suppose," he said, "that's where you were when you gave the boys the slip this afternoon. That damned Stathias is—"

"We didn't give anybody the slip," Miss Pender cut in. "I just borrowed Chris' car because I didn't want to drive my nice new Buick out into the woods. Chris' car happened to be behind his place; if you want your cops to follow me, they should ride with me because—"

"You won't get away from them again," Polcher howled; "I'll bet you on that."

"How much?" Miss Pender asked.

"Where is the Arnold dame?" Polcher looked at Steve.

"Steve doesn't know," Miss Pender said. "Nobody knows but me; have you got a warrant for Arlene's arrest?"

"There's a pickup out on her," Polcher countered, "for questioning."

"You haven't a damned thing to question her about," Miss Pender said flatly. "She has done her time; she has told you that she knows nothing of the Solomon jewelry. You railroaded her for harboring a fugitive. I'm harboring *her*. Try railroading *me*. My law-

yer is Murray Holden; in fact he is retained by Ware and Pender on an annual fee."

Polcher looked as if he was going to strangle, and Steve looked startled for a moment. If Miss Pender had retained the noted and successful criminal lawyer for the new firm, this was the first he had heard of it.

"I want that dame," Polcher's voice was hoarse.

"This is where we came in," Miss Pender looked at Steve. "You take over here; I've got a call to make while you entertain the law."

"No you don't," Polcher barked. "I've got men posted downstairs. I'll go right along with you until I'm sure they are on your trail; if you see the Arnold dame again, so will I."

Miss Pender shrugged. "All right. Steve, you stay here and let Miss Mitchell go eat. I'll call you later, or be back." She turned to Polcher. "Come along, watchdog."

When they were gone, Steve grinned at Miss Mitchell. "My new partner is making me very unpopular at 1300 Clark."

Miss Mitchell smiled. "I *am* hungry," she said.

"Trot right along and eat," Steve told her. "I'll hold the fort."

●

STEVE HAD been sitting at his desk, smoking his pipe thoughtfully, for some fifteen minutes when Sergeant Polcher barged into the reception room and right on through the open door of Steve's office. Polcher was hopping mad.

"Where is she?" he roared at Steve.

"Who?" Steve countered.

"That fugitive from a chamber of horrors," Polcher snarled. "Pender, that's who; where is she?"

Steve grinned. "You had her last. Did you lose her?"

"The she-hobgoblin locked me in the fire stairs," Polcher growled.

"How did she do that?" Steve asked. "Overpower you?"

Polcher's face reddened. "When we got to the elevators," he said, "she suddenly started running on toward the fire-stair door. I lit right out after her. She ran down one flight and out the door into the hall on the next floor and there I was. Those fire-stair doors open from the stairway side only with a key; she had one, damn her soul."

Steve lay back in his chair and laughed loud and long while Polcher swore at him. "How did you get out?" Steve finally gasped.

"I ran down to the bottom door where there is an emergency button," Polcher growled, "and the janitor let me out. But that hellcat didn't get out of the building. I had men posted front and back, to be sure to get a tail on her; she hadn't come out when I got to them. The building is surroun—"

Steve's unlisted telephone rang. He grinned at Polcher and picked it up. "Hello, Steve," Miss Pender's voice said in his ear. "If Polcher comes—"

"He's here," Steve interrupted.

"Put him on."

Steve held out the phone. "She wants to talk to you."

Polcher took the phone, listened for a few moments, then slammed it down with an unprintable remark.

"Was she surrendering?" Steve asked.

"She was at Union Station," Polcher growled. "Held the booth door open so I could hear the announcer calling the arrival of a B&O train. I'll jug that wench, so help—"

"Look, Dan," Steve cut in, "the law permits you to tag along with anybody you think should be followed. It does not allow you to pinch them without cause, and there is no law against a person losing you if they can. Don't lose your head. I'm beginning to understand my partner's feeling about you fellows; she's not a bad egg and if you'd quit riding—"

"Damn it, Ware," Polcher snapped, "she admits she is hiding the Arnold twist and—"

"Listen," Steve said, "if Arlene Ar-

nold is clean on the Solomon loot, is there any reason why the law should bother her now?"

"If, your grandmaw!" Polcher shot back. "The Arnold wench either has that stuff already, or she knows where it is."

"My partner says different," Steve said, "and I'm stringing with her; that hasn't lost me anything yet."

"Well, I want her," Polcher snarled, "and I want that Pender cartoon. First thing you know, I'm going to want you for obstructing—"

"Easy, Dan," Steve cautioned. "Cool down and I'll tell you where Edna Pender went."

"Where?"

"She went to have a talk with Arlene Arnold. I don't know where. Edna wouldn't tell me, because she says I'm too friendly with you. She says she is going to find out who is trying to kill Arlene—and I'll bet she does. The gal has plenty on the ball—and friends in queer places."

Polcher was silent for a moment, studying Steve. "You were a good guy and a help to the department," he said then, "until that scarecrow latched onto you. Now I don't know. Will you promise to make her stay here and talk to me in the morning? I want to go home."

"It's a deal," Steve said.

POLCHER had been gone ten minutes when Grace Mitchell came back. Steve told her how Miss Pender had lost Polcher and they had a laugh.

"You said you would tell me about Chris Stathias some time," Steve reminded; "tell me now."

"Chris came to St. Louis," Miss Mitchell said, "as a D.P. with his wife, two kids and a few dollars. He started a fishing house in a shack down by the river and worked up a pretty good business. Edna worked for him. Then one night the dump caught fire and burned down. Chris had it almost paid for, but he didn't have a penny of insurance; he was cleaned out. Edna cussed him about the insurance, then loaned him five thousand dollars. She borrowed two thousand of it from me. That was four years ago. Chris started that place on Taylor and has turned it into a gold mine. Why are you interested?"

Steve told her of the escape act which Chris had abetted without asking a question.

Miss Mitchell nodded. "If Edna had asked him for the place," she said, "Chris would have handed her the key and walked out; she makes that sort of friends."

Steve smiled. "Not at police headquarters."

The phone rang and Miss Mitchell answered at her desk. She put down the instrument a minute later and smiled at Steve. "You are to stay here," she said, "Edna will call you later. I'm going out to move Arlene Arnold to a safer place. I'll be back."

"Is that all I'm supposed to know?" Steve asked.

"That's all from me."

CHAPTER IV

STEVE SAT mulling over the events of the day, after Miss Mitchell had gone. He wondered what it was that his dynamic partner had learned at the Creve Coeur cabin. He went over the facts in the Solomon robbery again, trying to figure how Smoky Arnold could have slipped either loot or information to anybody but Arlene—or where and when Smoky could have disposed of the swag. He was still trying when his unlisted phone rang.

"Steve," Miss Pender's voice came over the wire. "I'm out near the dump where Arlene Arnold was staying. Grace has just left with Arlene. I'm onto the kink in this thing; you will be too, if you go over it with your wits working after I tell you what I just learned from Arlene. This is it. Smoky *had* been with Big Tom Borden's mob, but for six months before the Solomon job he had been very cocky, tell-

ing Arlene that Big Tom nor anybody else was pushing *him* around or cutting *his* take. Now that means that he had something, but good, on somebody. Big Tom, maybe. You know that Borden runs the rackets with plenty of protection in this town."

"Right," Steve agreed, "and Borden is a tough baby to mess with."

"I'm sort of tough, too. But let me finish. I don't think the Solomon jewels are behind the monkey-business with Arlene at all. Remember how that cabin was taken apart? As you said, the loot couldn't possibly have been hidden there. I think something like this happened. Arlene was taken care of after she went to the pen, and all the caretaker wanted to know was that the *stuff* was absolutely safe. Then Arlene made inquiries about the cabin. Right away somebody tore up the cabin—and Arlene got no more dough or privileges. So, somebody found the *stuff*. And it wasn't the Solomon loot; that makes it something that gave Smoky Arnold a hold over Big Tom—or some other Mr. Big."

"You may have something," Steve said, "but what are you going to do with it? If Mr. Big has recovered—"

"I'll do something," Miss Pender cut him off. "I've got a friend watching Big Tom, for one thing. For another, word is going to get to Big Tom about where Arlene is holed up. Only she has gone somewhere else; it will be me who is there to welcome whoever shows up."

"Hey," Steve exclaimed. "Watch yourself!"

"I'll be watching. But I want you to stay right there by the phone. I may need you in a hurry. Miss Mitchell will be there before long. I've got to go now; Big Tom will get word any minute."

"But what became of the jewels?" Steve asked quickly.

"And you're supposed to be a detective," Miss Pender retorted. "That's as plain as the nose on your face—even on my face. Figure it out."

STEVE STARTED to ask for the address where Miss Pender was setting her trap, but the line went dead. He swore and cradled the phone. He was pacing his office with his cold pipe in his mouth when Grace Mitchell returned at eleven o'clock.

"You," Steve snapped at the redhead, "tell me where she is. I mean it; she's fixing to get herself hurt."

Grace gave him a level look and shook her head. "Didn't she call you?"

"Yes, but she didn't tell me."

"Then she didn't want you to know."

"If anything happens—"

"Something always happens where Edna is," Grace cut him off. "I'm glad you're worried; so am I, but it's no use. You have things to learn about Edna. She has clawed her way up from shanty town with no help and plenty of hindrance. She can take care of herself. All we can do for her is be where she wants us when she wants us; let's take it as easy as we can." She sat down in the upholstered client's chair in Steve's office.

"Look," Steve said, "she's tangling in some way with Big Tom Borden. That's dangerous business; his goons play rough."

"My money," Miss Mitchell said, "is still on Edna."

"She said she has somebody watching Big Tom. Do you know who it is, and why it isn't me?"

"It's a taxi driver," Miss Mitchell replied, "who owns his own cab because Edna bought it for him. Edna probably knows why it isn't you; she has a couple of other friends doing some chores for her. One went to the right place to *accidentally* tip off Arlene Arnold's hideout. Only Arlene is at my place with another friend of Edna's on watch. Why don't you sit down and relax until we are needed?"

Steve sat down in his swivel chair. "She says she knows what happened to the Solomon loot," he said. "Do you?"

"No."

"She says I should be able to figure that out. Help me try. Here's what there is to figure with—"

•

They were still wrestling with the problems at one-thirty when Steve's phone rang. He snatched it up.

"Steve," it was Miss Pender, "a gorilla with a gun showed up and I think he's dead. He hadn't ought to be, but I think he is. I had to get out fast; cops will be there any minute. Get over there and find out all you can. Is Grace with you?"

"She's here, but—"

"Let me talk to her and you get going. The cops will find out I was there; the landlady will describe me. But you won't know where I am. Get started; Grace will give you the address where I wind up. The trouble was at 11— Eighteenth. Put Grace on."

•

POLICE cars were parked before the scabby rooming house when Steve Ware arrived. The neighborhood was awake and there was a small crowd of the curious. Steve knew one of the cops at the door.

"Hello, Hogan," he said; "who's in charge?"

Hogan named Foster King, night chief of homicide. Steve said he had information for King and Hogan let him go up to the second floor room. Officers were grouped around the burly body of a man which lay on the floor just inside the doorway.

"Hello, King," Steve said. "Who is he and what happened to him?"

The homicide chief snorted. "Steve Ware, what are you doing in this?"

"If you'll tell me what happened," Steve replied, "I may be able to tell you what caused it—or who."

"The lug is dead," King snapped. "He was shot, but the bullet couldn't have killed him. It only smashed some fingers and tore his forearm, but he's dead. Now tell me."

"My partner shot him," Steve said. "Who was he?"

"That Pender menace!" King barked. "Where is she?"

"I don't know at the moment," Steve replied. "I always level; you know that."

King opened his mouth and closed it again as feet pounded on the stairs and the medical examiner arrived. Ten minutes later the medico stood up, closed his black bag and looked at the homicide chief.

"Dead," the M.E. said, "less than an hour. Cause of death, heart attack. Superficial bullet wounds in hand and arm. Bled very little, because heart had stopped pumping; you can have him."

The men with the basket stepped forward. Technicians went to work on the room. Steve touched King's arm. "Let's be a little private down the hall," he said; "I can give you most of it."

They moved down the hall and King growled, "Give."

Steve gave. "So," he concluded, "the gunsel came here expecting to find Arlene Arnold; he found my partner instead—and she blasted first."

"That checks," King said. "A bullet hit the gun and glanced along the arm after tearing the fingers."

"She was shooting the gun out of his hand," Steve said; "do you know who he was?"

"Dobe Wertz, a Chicago triggerman. Gun for hire," King said. "Was a suspect in the Brothers rub-out."

"Well," Steve said. "Big Tom Borden is in this; he is the one who was tipped. Besides him, only my partner knew Arlene Arnold was in this room. I didn't know."

"Whoever tipped Borden knew," King pointed out, "and maybe others between. Look here, Ware; you have always played it straight with us. But Pender is something else again; I want

her and the Arnold. I will give you an hour to bring them in. Then I start after them—and you."

"But not Borden?" Steve said softly.

They exchanged a steady gaze; neither said anything. Steve didn't believe King was crooked, but they both knew that Borden would burn fingers.

"One hour," King said flatly.

Steve nodded and walked past the death room and down the stairs. He climbed into his car and drove back to the office. It was now a quarter of three.

●

MISS MITCHELL greeted him anxiously the moment he opened the door. "Have you seen Edna?"

"No," Steve replied, "but I want to, and quick."

"Steve," the red head exclaimed. "There's something wrong. She told me she was going to my place to stay with Arlene and I was to call her there as soon as any of her help phoned here with a report on Big Tom. Sid Garvin, the cabbie, called and I rang my apartment. Arlene answered. Edna hadn't come there or called; I'm worried."

"*You're* worried?" Steve shook his head. "Tell me everything she told you over the phone that last time; I've got to find that worry-wart."

"All I can tell you," Grace said, "is that she had expected somebody to come to that rooming house to kill Arlene. She intended to make the would-be killer talk. She said she was lying on the bed when there was a tap on the door. She said 'who is it?' and a man said he had a message from Miss Pender. Then she pulled on the light and told the killer that the door wasn't locked."

"The little idiot," Steve growled.

"She said the killer opened the door and his gun was in his hand. He didn't look like he was going to waste any time, so Edna shot at his gun. She said he dropped the gun and sort of groaned and then fell on his face. Edna ran to him and he looked dead; anyhow he couldn't talk before police got there and the house was waking up. So Edna ran out, down a back stairs and had to walk seven blocks to a phone in an all-night drug store, because I had taken her car to take Arlene to my place. That was all; she was going straight to my place—but she didn't."

"Did she say what drug store she was calling from?"

"No."

"The nearest," Steve said, "would have been at the Marquette. I'm going there. You'll be on the phone?"

Miss Mitchell nodded and Steve hurried out. His guess had been right. A clerk at the drugstore remembered that an ugly little woman in a hurry had come in and made a call from a booth some time after one. He hadn't been watching when she left. There the trail ended. Just before his hour was up, Steve called Miss Mitchell; there had been no word from Miss Pender.

"You move Arlene," Steve said; "and don't tell me, nor anybody else where. I have a feeling that having the police find her won't do Edna any good, and I want to tell the truth when I tell the police I don't know where either of them are. She may not like cops, but right now I want a lot of them. What was the report on Big Tom?"

"He threw a little party at his home on Kings Highway," Miss Mitchell said. "It broke up about midnight; Big Tom never left the place."

"I'll go into that," Steve said. "Right now I have a date at 1300 Clark."

●

AT HEADQUARTERS, Steve laid everything before the homicide chief, leaving out nothing except the fact that Arlene Arnold had briefly been at Grace Mitchell's apartment. "And," he concluded, "Big Tom Borden knows something about it. If Edna Pender is hurt, I'll reduce that big crook myself."

"We'll check," King promised.

Lieutenant Bart Howell had been

sitting in. "I told that meddlesome broad that she was headed for a fall," he said; "she may learn to keep her nose out of police business."

Steve glared at the big lieutenant, started to speak, thought better of it and walked out. Nobody stopped him. He drove back to the office. Miss Mitchell, sitting at her desk, looked haggard. Steve went to a filing cabinet in his office, produced a fifth of bourbon and glasses and carried them to Grace Mitchell's desk. They both drank big ones—straight. They knew by looking at each other that there was nothing new to report on Miss Pender.

"Can you hang on here?" Steve asked.

"I will," Grace replied. "I wish there was something else I *could* do."

"I'm going to get something to eat," Steve said; "then I'll sit here and drink up that liquor until I get myself in the notion of visiting Big Tom Borden."

Miss Mitchell shook her head. "Coffee's better. Bring me some and a chicken sandwich when—"

Her telephone rang and she broke off to answer. She listened and then said, "Come up here quick. Tell the night man to bring you to this office."

"Who was it?" Steve asked as she put down the phone.

"The cab driver who was watching Lieutenant Howell," she told him.

"Watching Howell?" Steve frowned. "I thought he was watching Borden."

"This is another one; Edna has set up half a dozen guys with cabs."

"Why did she have a tail on Howell?" Steve looked puzzled.

"Must have been a good idea," Grace replied. "This one thinks he knows what has happened to Edna. His name is Mike Rosso; he ought to be here any minute."

•

It was five o'clock and nearly daylight when Mike Rosso arrived. He was a swarthy, chunky little Italian who looked rumpled. There was a smear of dried blood about his right ear, he was carrying his cap and he was excited. He looked from Miss Mitchell to Steve and back. "I'ma clumsy fool," he blurted. "I'ma probably do wrong, but Miss Pender she's say not report to cops just here."

"Where is she?" Steve demanded impatiently.

"I'ma not sure. I tella you what happen. All night I'ma follow this Howell. Is about two o'clock when he's pinch Miss Pender, I think. But—"

"Pinched her," Steve cut in.

"Keep still," Miss Mitchell snapped, "and let him tell it. Go ahead, Mike."

"He's make her get in car," Mike went on, "and I'ma think is a pinch. But I follow and he's not take Miss Pender to police station; goes to old warehouse on Poplar. When they go in, Howell he's carry Miss Pender's purse. I think maybe I report here, but first I'ma sneak around warehouse to maybe see in a window. Is not many window, but is light in one too high up. Is fire escape on building across alley so I climb up to maybe see in. Old iron ladder she's break and I fall into hole with cellar steps bang on my head. I'ma just wake up while ago. Police car she's gone, so I'ma telephone here; I'ma clumsy fool."

"This was about two o'clock?" Steve said.

"Maybe she's half past."

"And that son sat in King's office with me two hours later while I tried to get something done," Steve snarled. "Miss Mitchell, ring Dan Polcher's home phone until you get him up. I want a cop in on this—and one I know isn't crooked." He gave her Polcher's phone number and turned into his private office.

Mike Rosso followed. "I'ma go along," the cab driver said. It wasn't a question.

CHAPTER V

STEVE TOOK a forty-five automatic with its shoulder rig from a closet. "You go along," he told Rosso, "to show us that warehouse."

"Here's Sergeant Polcher," Miss Mitchell called.

Steve took the phone from her hand and some rough dialogue ensued. Finally Steve put down the phone. "Dan will be here in fifteen minutes," he said; "where's that whisky?"

Miss Mitchell produced the bottle from beneath her desk and Steve brought three glasses. "You look as if you could use a stiff one," he said to Rosso.

"My head she's ache," the cabbie admitted.

They drank; then Steve picked up the phone and got through to the night homicide chief. "This is Steve Ware," he said. "Turned up anything?—Well, maybe I have. I'll be in. I want to see Howell, too. When does he go off duty?—Good. I'll be seeing you."

"What are you going to do?" Miss Mitchell asked as Steve put down the phone.

"We'll see when Polcher gets here," Steve replied. "Howell will be at headquarters until seven. Mike, will you go get us a gallon of coffee and some sandwiches in a hurry?"

Mike went. They had wrecked the provender when Sergeant Polcher arrived at ten minutes before six. Polcher was in a bad mood, and it didn't improve as he listened to Steve, with Mike Rosso substantiating.

"She needed pinching," Polcher growled; "she killed a guy, didn't she? Howell probably put her away where her high-priced shyster couldn't spring her until we find the Arnold dame."

"Damn it, Dan," Steve retorted, "be your age. She shot that ape in self-defense—and how did Howell know anything about it? He hadn't been near that rooming house. Mike can vouch for that; he tailed Howell all night."

"What business did he have tailing an officer?" Polcher barked. "Damn Pender anyhow. I don't know what I'm doing out of bed at this hour just because she got herself in a wringer. She laid in wait to shoot a man in self-defense. Nuts! I'll have her gun and license now."

"Look, Dan," Steve argued. "Howell knows where she is and she's being held unlawfully. Are you going to help me find her—or do I go do it the hard way? Howell is up to something crooked, or Edna wouldn't have had him watched."

"Listen," Miss Mitchell put in, "since this happened to tie in with the rest, I've got an idea. Edna said it was plain what Smoky Arnold did with those Solomon jewels. We missed something in checking over. Smoky was alone, for at least a minute, with somebody else besides Arlene. He was alone with Howell in that arcade. He could have slipped the loot to Howell and—"

"Hellfire," Polcher interrupted hotly; "according to you people, all the crooks are in the police department."

"I think we might find *one*," Steve retorted. "Grace has a point, but let's not argue over it now. Let's have a look in that warehouse, without Howell knowing it." He looked at Polcher. "Are you going to lend authority—or pinch me for breaking in?"

Polcher shrugged. "We'll look."

"Let's go," Steve said. "I guess you can go home, Grace. You've had a tough stretch."

"Edna said stay here," the redhead said; "I'll stay."

•

THERE WAS a padlock on the warehouse door and no answer when Steve pounded. Mike Rosso had led the way in his cab with Polcher and Steve following in their own cars. Rosso brought a heavy tire-iron and pried off the padlock. The warehouse was empty, but there was evidence that cars or trucks had been kept there recently. There were two sleeping cots in a small partitioned off room in which there was a high window.

"Well," Polcher said, "that's that; Rosso, show me where you fell when that ladder broke."

They went out and down a narrow, cobbled alley leading down to the river. Rosso pointed out the freshly broken ladder on the building across the alley. Beneath it was a cellar areaway. Blood from Rosso's head had dried on the stone steps.

"Humpf," Polcher looked down the alley. "Not far to the river."

Steve didn't want to think about that. "Let's go get Howell," he said grimly; "he'll tell *me*."

Polcher stood frowning for a moment. "I'll play with you," he said then; "but not that way. If she's in the river, we can't help it. If he took her someplace else, he'll go there when he gets off duty. We'll tail him; I'll go to headquarters now and—"

●

Lieutenant Howell left headquarters in his personal car at ten minutes past seven. Two other cars and a cab strung out and alternating the trailing job followed him out South Broadway. Some distance south of Manion's Park, Howell turned off on a narrow, little used road leading into the scrubby timber along the river. When he was into the timber the three following machines pulled off the highway and Polcher, Steve and Rosso got out for a conference.

"A crooked cop I hate," Polcher growled. "He said he was going home; that's a one way road to nowhere."

"What we do now?" Rosso asked.

"I'm going in there after him," Steve said. "It looks nice and lonely; you guys just let me have him. If Edna isn't there somewhere, I'll damn soon find out where she is."

"I'll go along," Polcher said, "but you can have him."

"I go too," Rosso declared.

"No, Mike," Steve said. "You drive your cab into this road a ways and block it. If he tries to get out, use that gun I gave you. But don't kill him; he's got to talk."

"He will," Polcher said. "We'd better go in on foot with our guns ready. He must have some sort of hiding-place in there. It's only a few hundred yards through those trees to the river."

"Let's make it fast," Steve urged, "before he gets his car out of sight." He started running down the narrow dirt road and Polcher pounded after him.

STEVE WAS running on the balls of his feet to make as little noise as possible and he had just reached the edge of the timber when he heard a car door slam. He stopped and turned with a finger to his lips for silence. Polcher slowed down and came up breathing hard.

"He's over that way," Steve spoke softly and pointed.

Through the trees and brush they could see a low, windowless building. They pushed through the brush carefully and soon saw Howell's car. The lieutenant was walking away from it towards the building which they could now see was an old ice-house, probably long abandoned—a victim of modern refrigeration. From the shelter of a thicket they watched Howell approach a door in the end of the building.

"Shall we jump him?" Steve whispered.

"Let him open the door first," Polcher whispered back; "I see a padlock on that bar."

Howell had reached the door. He kicked away some brush and leaves beside it and picked up something.

"That's Edna's shoulder bag," Steve whispered.

"Let him open up," Polcher said. "He isn't killing her right away—or he'd have done it before. Maybe we can slip up and hear something."

"I want to *see* something," Steve retorted. "Edna Pender."

Hanging the purse on his own shoulder, Howell produced a key and opened the massive door. He peered into the dark interior and started to step inside. Then there was a sudden flurry of action and a scream from

Howell as he reeled back and fell, rolling. Something burst from the door and landed on top of him. It was Miss Pender. She was a dirty and disheveled bunch of action and fury; she struck again and again at Howell's head.

Steve leaped from the thicket. "Hey," he yelled as he raced towards her with Polcher at his heels, "don't kill him!"

"Stop it," Polcher bellowed.

Miss Pender looked around, saw them and rose with her shoulder bag in her left hand and a set of brass knuckles gleaming on the other. Hair awry, clothes torn, soiled and covered with ancient sawdust, she stood astride her moaning victim. Polcher said afterward that she should have put her foot on Howell's chest and howled.

Instead she said, "Fancy meeting you two here. Here's your undercover Mr. Big—the rat Smoky Arnold slipped that Solomon loot to. He's going to tell me where it is—and nobody is going to stop me."

Howell's eyes were filled with blood from the cut where Miss Pender's first blow had landed slantwise across his brow and the bridge of his nose. He groaned and his hand groped towards his armpit. Miss Pender kicked his hand, stooped and came up with a gun which she tossed toward Steve and Polcher. Polcher picked it up.

"We figured Howell out," Steve said; "that's why we're here. You might have tipped me to him on the phone."

"You always go to cops," she glared at Polcher, "and they wouldn't have believed me. I'd have done all right if you hadn't come along. All I ask is that you don't be damn nuisances now. This is my meat," she kicked Howell, "and I'm going to recover the Solomon stuff. This louse got the drop on me last night. Him and a goon brought me here and wound me up in a hundred feet of closeline. I wiggled out of the ropes but that place is just smooth walls and nothing in it but stale sawdust. I had these," she held up the knucks, "sewed to my girdle. So I put them on and waited beside the door for the louse. He was going to do things to make me tell where Arlene is, after he got off duty, now I'm going to do things, myself."

HOWELL squirmed and wiped enough blood from his eyes to recognize Polcher. "Stop her, Dan," he begged through battered lips. "I just grabbed her to find out where the Arnold dame is; she's crazy."

Polcher scowled at the old icehouse. "Hell of a place to bring a prisoner," he said.

Miss Pender had dropped her knucks into her purse and brought out her .25 long barreled automatic. "This can be simple," she said, "or the louse can get where he can stall. I'm going to talk to him a while inside that insulated icehouse. It smothers noise. I tried it."

"Might be a good idea, Dan," Steve urged.

With his mouth a tight line, Polcher stood silent, looking at the prone Howell. Then he spat, "Damn crooked cop!"

Steve stepped forward and yanked Howell to his feet.

"Put him inside with me," Miss Pender said, "and leave the door open, so I can see to shoot."

"I've got to go back to my car for handcuffs," Polcher said suddenly.

Steve smiled grimly at Miss Pender as Polcher started to go back through the brush toward the byroad. "Inside, my fran," he said, jerking Howell towards the open door.

Miss Pender turned to follow, gun in her small hand, when a voice called from behind them. "Everybody stand still or this one dies!"

They stopped. A pockmarked man had popped from hiding in the brush and stood with a revolver-muzzle jammed into the middle of Polcher's back. The sergeant had his arms held high.

"This gun is cocked," the newcomer warned. "One wrong move, and I will

pull the trigger. Release Mr. Howell; I have seen you run in here after him."

Howell jerked loose from Steve and fell forward to his knees. "Shoot, Juan," he yelled frantically, "kill them all."

Steve was frozen. A move for his gun would most certainly mean death for Polcher. But Miss Pender's gun was in her hand and from where she stood she could see part of the other man's gun; she moved very slightly and fired.

The heavier report of Juan's gun followed the spiteful crack of Miss Pender's, but the .25 slug had knocked the revolver far aside. Unhit, Polcher threw himself to the ground. Miss Pender shot again and the other fell howling with a shattered knee. Steve had recaptured Howell. A car roared up on the byroad and Mike Rosso came crashing through the brush, gun in hand. He stopped and surveyed the tableau.

"Everything she's jake?" he asked. "You are hurt, Miss Pender?"

"No, Mike," Miss Pender said.

The gunsel had lost interest in everything but his injured knee. Polcher got up; color was returning to his face. He looked down at Juan, then over at Steve holding Howell.

"Rosso and me," he said, "had better take this bird in fast and have a doctor look after him. I deputize you two to bring in that crooked cop."

There was stark terror on Howell's battered face. "Take me along with you, Dan," he begged Polcher, "and I'll give you a break that will. . ."

Polcher ignored him. "Come on, Rosso," he said. "Let's pick up this guy."

AS THEY carried Juan into the brush towards Mike's cab Miss Pender wiggled her gun at Howell. "Now," she snapped, "do you talk here, or shall we take you inside? I hope you feel stubborn."

Howell talked. He knew how Miss Pender had persuaded a tongue-tied kidnaper, and he didn't fancy conferring with her in a semi-dark ice-house.

"Where are the Solomon jewels?" Miss Pender demanded. "And don't lie, because we'll check before you ever get out of our hands."

Howell licked his bruised lips. "In the wall safe at my home," he croaked.

"What did you find in Smoky's cabin that caused you to quit taking care of Arlene in the pen?"

"A bundle of papers that would jug Big Tom Borden and expose my tieup with his mob."

"Where are they now?"

"I burned the letter Smoky wrote for the D.A. and gave the other papers to Big Tom."

"But you thought," Miss Pender said, "that besides telling Arlene where those papers were, Smoky had told her enough to expose you, so she had to be killed; it was you who shot at her behind the Maryland."

"No," Howell croaked. "Dobe Wertz did that. Big Tom had him down here on another job; Big Tom didn't want his pipe into the department ruined."

"I see," Miss Pender said; "and Borden hadn't got word to you that he had located Arlene and sent Wertz after her, so you grabbed me. You must have been happy when you got back to headquarters and found out that I had killed that gunsel and Arlene was still safe."

"You didn't kill Wertz," Steve told her; "he died of a heart attack."

"Then I brought it on," she retorted; "I want the credit. And now, Howell, I want the combination of your wall safe. Then we'll go to our office and call Dan Polcher and you can write it all down. Make one phony move on the way and I'll shoot you like a mad dog; remember, I'm deputized to bring you in."

●

IT WAS nearing noon. Polcher, Miss Pender, Steve and Miss Mitchell were gathered in Steve's office. Two

detectives had taken Howell away. His bulky confession, typed by Miss Mitchell, was in Polcher's pocket. Other officers were out making a score of other arrests, including that of Big Tom Borden.

"Brother Polcher," Steve observed. "This cleanup should elevate you in the department. You'll have to admit that my partner put on quite a housewarming. Do you still want to disarm her? You were lucky that she had her popgun in hand this morning."

Polcher almost smiled. "She can keep it," he growled.

"And while you are in the mood," Miss Pender said, "I'd better have a permit for my brass knuckles."

Polcher snorted. "You wouldn't want to carry a bolo and a bow-and-arrow, would you?"

Miss Mitchell laughed and the others joined in; it was relaxing.

Edna stood up. She was still in the bedraggled garments of the night. "I've got some other clothes in my office closet," she said. "I'll change, Grace. Then you and I will go tell Arlene Arnold that the cops are not going to pester her any more."

"Say, Pender," Polcher said with a sudden change of expression, "maybe you didn't give a damn whether that Juan blew a hole in me or not!"

Miss Pender turned in Steve's doorway and looked at the beefy sergeant. Then she smiled; without a word, she then turned towards her own office.

Polcher's mouth had been hanging open. He closed it. "By gawd," he marveled, "for a minute, she was gone; there was another woman standing there."

"Wasn't there? Steve agreed.

"Give her credit," Miss Mitchell said. "I would have let that Juan shoot you, Polcher. You have ridden Edna ever since she was a kid making faces at you on the shanty town beat."

Polcher grunted. "She made faces? Who could tell?"

"Beauty is only skin deep," the redhead retorted, "and don't you suggest skinning Edna."

Polcher grinned. Then he turned to Steve. "Hold her down, will you, fellow. Last night's work is going to make her the fairhaired girl with Mr. Whisker's gang. More than a million bucks worth of dope buried in the sawdust in the old ice-house. And what the papers are going to do with this?"

"Lucky you got that out of Juan Vargas," Steve said, "or Howell might have held out about the narcotics."

"That stinking rat—and him a lieutenant," Polcher snarled. "I hope we dig up something that will hang him. He was so crooked that he even held out those Solomon jewels on the Borden mob when he saw a chance to frame the Arnold skirt. And two hundred grand in dirty money in that safe at home. He admitted he meant to clear out for South America when he had half a million. He waited too long."

"I feel sorry for his wife," Grace Mitchell said.

"Why?" Polcher snapped. "She probably put him up to it."

"Just like a cop," Miss Pender, in fresh clothes spoke from the doorway. "Yesterday, Arlene Arnold was a crook. Now it's Mrs. Howell. Out of our fees in this business, I'm going to put Arlene on her feet, and take care of any other decent people that got hurt."

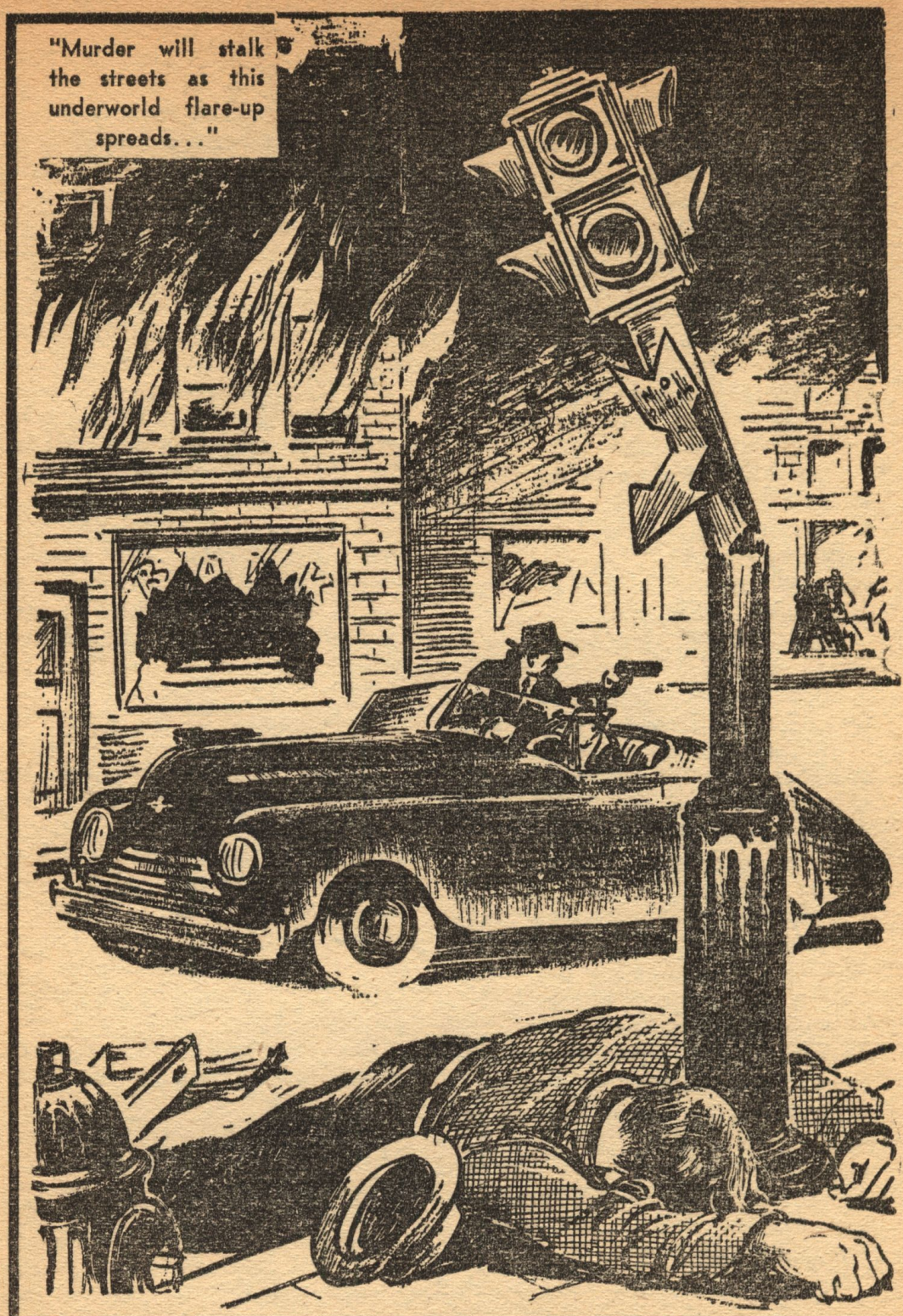
Polcher grunted. "You can afford it—out of eighteen grand. Quite a night's work."

"That's just for the Solomon stuff," Miss Pender said; "I'll bet you we collect a lot more."

"Don't bet with her," Steve warned.

Polcher got to his feet. "I wouldn't even bet her she couldn't win a beauty contest," he growled as he strode to the corridor door. "Goodbye," he said just before he slammed it.

COMING NEXT ISSUE
THE BONDSMAN OF BIG STREET
by Rex Whitechurch



A columnist summed it up when he noted: "Among those in the know, there is a growing belief that a certain reporter has taken a national award too seriously, and has generaled a bloody campaign to clean up the underworld. Could be." But Jim Connor himself knew he was not "The Pig", as the unknown executioner was called by the racket-men and their hangers-on.

BID FOR THE DEVIL'S THRONE

NOVELET of FIENDISH CUNNING

★ **By Daniel R. Gilgannon** ★

I SWORE. Like a trooper I swore at the yellow radiogram in my hand. JAMES CONNOR S. S. EXCELSIOR RETURN IMMEDIATELY. MURDER OUTBREAK HERE. EXPENSES PAID. BONUS. BEMIS HARRINGTON

Here I was, half a day out of Southampton and on a European vacation I'd planned ever since I was a cub reporter on the *Star;* now a rock-hearted editor called Bemis Harrington was reaching across three thousand miles of ocean to pull the bonbons right out of my mouth.

"To blazes with him," I fumed. I rolled the radiogram into a ball, and with a southpaw motion heaved it over taffrail of the steamer. Just because I won the National Press award last year for my hometown crime "exposes" series in the *Star* was no reason to yank me back every time some fools went and got themselves murdered. Probably they deserved it.

"They"—I wondered who "they" might be. There was "Big Ned" Boyle who the dopesters said was headed for an early funeral because of a double-cross. I shook the speculations out of my head and planted myself in a deck chair with *"The History of London"*. I hated being just an ordinary gawking tourist; I liked to feel I was being intelligent about it.

Chapter One droned along as if it had been written between sips of tea on a lazy English afternoon. My mind couldn't take the snail's pace and wandered off to a familiar track.

It tried to picture who was occupying the coffins in this murder wave; and who were cleaning the lethal, smoke-grimed guns in backroom hideouts. The hometown hadn't had an outright crime-explosion in fifteen years. True, the rackets flourished, but they were well "policed" by the hoodlums themselves. Urbanely crooked officials smoothed the rough spots, push-buttoned the supposedly free and democratic city elections, and in mellow old age retired fat, dignified and well-heeled to trim suburban homes, mortgages fully paid.

My bitter two-fisted series last year

on the town's grubby underworld and its controlling uppercrust had startled the local citizenry into vigorous action. A new regime was swept into City Hall. Then everyone settled back and slumbered, like a hound that has done its spell of barking and curls up in the porch sunshine again.

I became aware of the book in my hand and was surprised to find myself starting Chapter Two. I hadn't the foggiest notion of Chapter One. I focused my thoughts on the print again. But this fellow's style was right out of an undertaker's prospectus; I dropped the book in my lap and stared at the swells of dark blue-black water.

There had been rumors of an underworld upheaval when I left. But there were always such rumors; corner bums and bar-flies dreamed them up to get handouts from a news-hungry reporter. Maybe this time, though, something was in the wind. And that line about *"Expenses paid. Bonus"*. got me. Money is so nice.

I opened the book at random. My eyes fell on the line, *"London is such an exciting place."* I bet! From a sitting position, with a labored grunt, I lobbed *"The History of London"* into the deep blue sea.

●

THREE DAYS later, thanks to transatlantic airliner, I had the dust cover off my mill in the city room of the *Star*. The city was in an uproar; six murders in as many days. The uproar wasn't exactly one of indignation. Whoever was doing the killings must have been briefed on the aristocracy of the local underworld by the Kefauver Committee; each victim was the kingpin of his particular racket.

Like "Louie the Hat", skull-faced chieftain of the numbers game and "Commissioner" White, ironically so called because of the high commissions he took from the slot-machines around town. If a new mob was moving in, it was doing it the right way—polishing off the old high-command.

I was sitting at my desk, rubbing my fingers through my hair, trying to piece a story together out of the clips of the latest stories on the killings when the phone jangled.

I sensed the news even before an excited voice blew out of the ear piece. "Rocky Bynner just got it. In a tenement at Seventh and Arbutus. Two bullets..."

I yelled for a re-write to take the leg-man's stuff and tore out of the city room for Seventh and Arbutus.

The curb in front of the tenement was clogged with police cars. My cab double-parked while I honked out and threaded my way between auto-bumpers. I was so engrossed in my bumper ballet that I didn't notice the stately blonde with the baby-carriage till I ran into her as I pirouetted on the sidewalk.

I apologized profusely. Apologies with a girl like her to apologize to is something I could do all night. I was thinking of furthering my acquaintance by cooing admiringly at the infant hidden under the blankets, but her cold stare dissuaded me. Anyway a married woman is outside my bachelor's list. In a case like this, though, I was tempted to make an exception.

With a tip of my hat I strode off to the shabby tenement. Curious heads rested elbow-wise on window sills and gossipped across the intervening spaces. The tenement stoop and doorway teemed with silver shields.

One of them stopped me as I started up the steps. I flashed my press card and asked for Inspector Donohue. The cop nodded me respectfully in.

Inspector Donohue's silvery thatch was bent over the late Rocky Bynner when I entered the scene of the crime. His head turned slowly, scrutinizing

the room for the probable direction of the shots. He spotted me and nodded. I walked over and stared down at the blood-stained shirt and the two neat holes in it, just over the heart. Marksmanship!

"Didn't know what hit him," I commented.

Donohue straightened up his meatless 125 pound frame. For a man of sixty his movements were effortless.

"You know, Jim," he said softly in that tired schoolmasterish voice of his, "murder is a dirty business."

I sensed an unpleasant implication. "That's what you say, Inspector. But what do you mean?"

"Mean? Well, you figure it out. You've been away out of everyone's sight while all these killings have been taking place. And you let everyone know often enough you hated some of these fellows like poison." Donohue didn't even look at me when he made that crack, staring instead at the open windows.

"Listen, Donohue, I've been practically in Europe. I can—"

"Yes, I know; you can prove it," he broke in wearily as if listening to the replay of an old record. "Ticket stubs, luggage labels, timetables. All the usual."

"Come off it, Donohue; you know I didn't kill anybody. Why should I stick my neck out killing people I didn't even know?"

"You knew enough about them, Jim, to write that series of articles last year."

"That's different. I didn't go directly to them for my dirt; no crook will tell a reporter what crimes he's committing. I dug up the facts on my own. No Hollywood-style interviews with characters like Bynner here."

"Yes, I know. On your own. Maybe you decided that digging up the facts wasn't enough to clean up the city; maybe you decided to do a little burying as well." The Inspector tossed a glance over his shoulder at the outstretched form.

I stormed up to Donohue. "Listen, I always liked you. I thought you liked me, too, but this is the end of the line."

Donohue opened his eyes wide in mock horror and sucked on his false teeth to hide a smile. I shoved both my hands in my back pockets to keep them from taking a swing at him. "I'm no killer," I said hotly. "Tell that to the frame-up boys in City Hall," and I stalked away.

A FIRM hand reached out and pulled me back. "I didn't say you were a killer, Jim," Donohue said gently. "I'm just telling you what ideas some people are getting. You should know just in case." He patted my shoulder. "I know you wouldn't kill anything; you can't even kill one of those corny purple sentences in your stories. Sometimes they'd be better off dead."

I laughed with relief. I liked the old Inspector, liked having him on my side. And that crack about my purple prose was the reassuring password of friendship between us; he's been heaving that brick at me ever since I knew him.

He offered me a cigarette now. "Jim, do you notice the windows over by the fire escape?" he asked, blowing out a match.

"They're open. Rocky liked fresh air, I guess."

"So was the front door and that dumbwaiter door over there. I don't think Rocky liked fresh air that much."

"I see what you mean, Inspector. For a fellow who was supposedly holing up from the killer, he was awfully careless about entrances. Most cops have to worry about murder cases with everything locked. The famous 'locked room' mystery. This is a new twist."

"That's what I mean, Jim. Someone left all these things open to take the mystery out of the way the murderer entered. Therefore, there *is* a mystery about the way he entered."

"Say, that's right. How did he really

get in, assuming that Rocky was in all probability locked in?"

"The dumbwaiter, Jim."

I walked over to the open dumbwaiter and looked down the shaft. The stale odors of a decade of cooked meals were trapped in its musty air. I reached out and pulled on the rope. In a chorus of squeaks the dumbwaiter rode up to our floor. "You mean, Inspector, someone could ride up in this thing?"

"I'm stumped there, Jim. The box is too small and the rope too weak; but somehow I know that dumbwaiter had something to do with the murder."

"Why?"

"I feel it, Jim, and because it seems the most unlikely."

"You'll never get into a detective story, Donohue, if you talk as illogically as that."

Donohue laughed. "Hello, what's this?" He reached in the dumbwaiter to pull a piece of white organdie-like cloth off an exposed nail.

"Looks like a piece of a baby's dress," I said. As a baby-sitting uncle, I have seen enough kiddies' dresses to know.

"It does at that; I thought I had a clue for a moment."

"What do you mean? Haven't you?"

"Of course not, Jim. There are probably two dozen young children living in this tenement house and where do all their old clothes end? On this dumbwaiter. By the time I traced this piece of cloth to the third child of the second family on the fifth floor, I'd be ready for retirement." Donohue tossed the cloth back in the dumbwaiter.

"Hey, don't do that." I reached in and took it out.

The inspector shrugged. "I suppose you'll play it up as a vital clue of some sort." Donohue's smile was disparaging.

"Sure, Inspector. Can't you see the headline: *Baby Slaughters Rocky Bynner. Escapes In Dumbwaiter.*"

Donohue made a gesture of despair and left, signalling for one of the patrolmen to stand guard in the flat. I tagged along, pumping him for the necessary facts on the killing. Nobody heard the shots. That meant a silencer. The body had been discovered by some kids snooping in the corridor who had been attracted by the open door. The medical examiner placed the death at about an hour earlier than that.

CHAPTER II

I WOVE it all into my story for the late editions, but my main theme was *"Who's Next?"*. I put down my guesses: "Doc" Weston, the boss of the narcotics peddlers; "Tiger Joe" Benton, the stolen-car merchant; and watery-eyed "Ma" Boland, who ruled with her bejewelled, pudgy fists a sordid kingdom of pimps and prostitutes.

The paper barely had hit the stands when the phone rang in my apartment. I picked up the receiver. A motherly voice rasped in my ear. "You forgot to put one big name on the list, sonny." I recognized the voice.

"Whose name, Ma Boland?" I said her name with mock deference. I hated her like a venomed toad; yet with her sex-blackmail she held some of City Hall's top men under her thumb.

"Your own name, stupid. You're dead from the neck up, but keep writing the way you are and you'll be dead the rest of the way down too."

I wanted to sting back at this mottled-face wasp, but I couldn't afford to do it now. I wanted information and she might have some. "Now, Ma," I soft-soaped her, "it was only in the way of a friendly warning I put your name on the list."

"I can look after myself, mister."

"You know, Ma, some people think I'm the killer."

"You—you *The Pig?*" she shrieked and went off into a cascade of belly laughter.

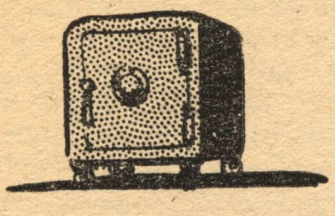
"The Pig." I repeated the words to myself. So that was the name of the

outsider trying to take over the rackets and mount the devil's throne as top man of the local underworld.

I waited till the laughter died. "Do you know, Ma, who *The Pig* is?"

"No, and if I did I wouldn't tell a louse like you." She hung up.

I sat back in an armchair, chain-smoking, racking my brains for some recollection of *The Pig*. Apparently he



was a newcomer to the crime scene. Maybe Donohue might know. I'd wait till I saw him tomorrow; already I had wasted more than an hour in fruitless speculation.

The phone jingled. It was Ma Boland again, but this time the toughness was gone out of her tone. She mumbled something about how easy a person can make a mistake. This humble Ma Boland was a new one to me; I wondered what it was all leading up to.

"Of course, you may really be *The Pig,*" she said with a sudden, rapid crispness as if she had just then mustered her courage to dare the remark. She paused, but I refused to commit myself. I waited her out.

"If you are," she continued, her voice a little less firm now, "maybe we can make a deal of some kind. Something like sixty and forty."

"Sixty for me? Well, perhaps; we'll see." I hung up abruptly, grinning. I was enjoying this new role thrust upon me. But when I did a little thinking about it, I found my pleasure slipping away. What would happen when Ma Boland found out I wasn't really *The Pig?* She wouldn't relish my playing her for a sucker. And there was the matter of the racket men still alive. They might decide that instead of waiting for *The Pig* to strike they would strike first—especially since they'd decided who *The Pig* was. Me!

I DECIDED suddenly I wanted to be surrounded by people. I would feel safer in a crowd. The hotel bar downstairs loomed as a pleasant oasis of safety. But when I stepped out of the elevator into the lobby my hopes for safety vanished. Three men quietly sidled up to me.

"Keep walking straight ahead," a voice whispered harshly. "The Doc wants to see you."

My knees sagged. Doc Weston, the narcotics king, evidently had me figured, too, for *The Pig* and was going to end my threat to his own life and little empire.

A gun-barrel nudged me forward. I looked around for Sam Tighe, the house detective. He was standing near the entrance chatting with an old lady. I hoped he would look my way. Instead he remained listening attentively, puffing on a cigar. But just as I was abreast of him the old lady spied me.

"Aren't you the famous reporter Jim Connor?" she exclaimed gushingly, rushing over to me. Sam glanced over. I tried desperately to say *"Help"* with my eyes. Whether Sam actually read my eyes or recognized Weston's hoodlums I shall never know. In an instant he had his gun out; the men around me moved away quickly, one gun spitting lead at Sam who crumpled to the floor, his own revolver barking wildly twice in the direction of the fleeing killers.

By the time I was kneeling at Sam's side, he was dead. My phony role as *The Pig* had ceased to be funny.

●

The men from homicide questioned me about the shooting. They knew me well; yet now their manner towards me was impersonal and occasionally outright hostile. Perhaps they felt I was in some way responsible for the death of old Tighe, a retired member

of the Force and a well-liked person. However, I sensed another reason: I remembered Inspector Donohue's warning of the talk that was going the rounds—that I was somehow connected with the underworld purge killings. The talk must have reached quite a point when it could cause Ma Boland to take notice.

●

The next morning I began to take greater notice too. I was reading Mort Phelps' column in the Morning Herald when I spotted the line about me.

"*Among those in the know*," the column said, "*there is a growing belief that a certain reporter has taken a national award too seriously, and has generaled a bloody campaign to clean up the underworld. Could be.*"

That made me sore, but not half as sore as when Bemis Harrington called me into his editorial office down at the *Star*.

"Jim," he said nervously. "I've just had a talk with McGregor."

"And," I said suspiciously. McGregor was the publisher and owner.

"He's worried about all this talk about you and these killings."

"Good Lord," I exclaimed, "this whispering campaign is really in high gear. I never thought any news ever reached McGregor in that swank ivory tower of his."

"Mr. McGregor would like it if you left town for a few days. A vacation, or something like that—with pay of course."

"Oh no, you don't, Harrington. You called me back from a vacation to get the story on these killings and I'm getting it. Besides there's also a matter of a bonus. Remember." I got up and left, shutting the door on a storm of Bemis' editorial anathemas. He didn't really mean them, but he was afraid of bettle-browed McGregor, who fired editors as if they were bell-hops.

FROM HARRINGTON'S office I headed straight for a grubby little office over a bakery shop on Fernwood Street. When you wanted to find out where a dirty whispering campaign originated, it was standard procedure to start with the rum-sodden, run-down ex-advertising genius, Brooks Gaylord, who was master unexcelled at the art.

In his intermittent moments of sobriety he is credited with some of the juiciest and the lowest rumor-merchandising in recent memory. Take the case of white-haired, genteel Governor Hardy, who was sure-fire to win the Presidential nomination till "rake-up-the-mud-or-make-up-the-mud" Brooks Gaylord master-minded that famous whispering campaign. After it, Hardy couldn't even run for dogcatcher.

I trotted up the stairs to Gaylord's hole-in-the-wall office loaded with three bottles of bourbon to oil the rumor-monger's tongue.

Without rising to greet me, Gaylord waved to me from a battered wooden table on which were scattered racing forms and an empty bottle. His eyes lit up when I dropped the fresh supplies of bourbon on the table. He cordially pointed to a chair whose legs were dubiously held together by wires.

I chatted casually, talking about the horses and the weather till half a bottle had vanished into Gaylord. Then I took the bull by the horns. "That's a nice job you're doing on me, Brooks."

"Tut, tut," he said deprecatingly, filling up his glass. "It really isn't very much. You see I like you—and I can't really do my best when I like a guy. Here's how."

"Thanks," I said; "it's white of you."

"Now, now, please don't get offended." He leaned forward groggily to paw my arm affectionately. "A guy's got to make a living somehow."

I casually flashed a twenty. "Who's paying for your living this time?"

Brooks eyed the bill and shook his head as if debating with himself. He tossed down another drink to ease his conscience, then reached out for the twenty. I pulled it back.

"Well, I tell you. It's that guy Denvers from City Hall and a blonde." He rolled his eyes appreciatively at the thought of the blonde and his hands shakily traced a curve. He stopped abruptly to pluck the twenty from my hand.

"A blonde? Tall, sort of statuesque, and very good-looking?" I asked.

"She is all that. Know her?"

"Not exactly; I bumped into her once."

Gaylord raised his eyebrows stupidly. "Where?"

"At a murder."

He grinned. "Nice girl."

The phone at his elbow went off. Gaylord took a quick one on the bottle and then answered. "Your girl the blonde," he said to me, winking.

"Do you know who's here?" he said into the phone. "James Connor. Yes, no one else but the great James Connor. Fate itself, isn't it?"

He lapsed into a long spell of listening, uh-uh-ing every so often when he hadn't a glassful at his lips. "Fine, fine," he said finally. "Will do." When he hung up, his bloated face wore the grin of the Cheshire cat.

I fished around for some information about that phone call, but Brooks Gaylord wasn't that drunk. It would probably take the entire output of a distillery to make an alcohol-conditioned brain like that foggy.

I was wasting time. I had the information I wanted anyway about the people behind the whispering campaign branding me *The Pig*. I got up to leave. Brooks' hand slipped into the table drawer and came up with a steel-blue automatic. "But you're staying, Connor. I like your company."

"You're looney, Brooks, pulling a stunt like this; I'll have you in the clink faster than you can turn out a dirty rumor."

"Now really," he said grinning. "You forget I have such good friends. Like Mr. Denvers, for instance. He wouldn't let anything happen to me."

DENVERS was one of the very rotten apples that smuggled their way into City Hall last fall under the banner of the Reform Group. He talked publicly like a preacher and in private was a money-mad heel. I could see how he'd fit in with the real *Pig*, but what was the blonde's angle?

"Did you hear me?" Gaylord snapped. "I said 'Sit down'."

"Pardon my discourtesy," I said sourly. "I was just thinking; of course, you wouldn't know about such a thing."

Gaylord laughed. "You can't make me sore, Connor. I'm a bum and I know it. So what? Probably I'll live longer than the big-thinkers like you."

"If your life is living, you can have all of my share, too," I said, sitting back in the wobbly chair and hoping for some brainstorm to put over on this character with the automatic.

"Your wallet now," said Gaylord, beckoning with his hand.

"Listen, Brooks, if all that's worrying you is a few bucks I'll let you have fifty or so and no hard feelings."

"The wallet."

I passed it over. He backed up to the door and slipped it to some one waiting outside. Something was in the wind and I felt very uncomfortable about it. I sensed it was my goose that was in some way being cooked crisp.

"Now we'll wait," Gaylord said. "What shall we talk about?"

"*Shoes and ships and sealing wax—*"

" '*Of cabbages and kings,*' " Gaylord broke in smugly, " '*And why the sea is boiling hot and whether pigs have wings*'. Wonderful nonsense Carroll wrote. Now in the matter of shoes..."

For over an hour Brooks kept up his monologue of commentary, soothing his throat frequently with a dash of bourbon. The phone rang; he answered, nodded, and hung up.

"You can go now," he said, still holding the gun on me. "You were such nice company. Call again."

I wanted to take a poke at him, but the snub-nosed gun discouraged it.

CHAPTER III

I LOPED down the dingy staircase, my brain trying to fathom Gaylord's behaviour. The only reason I could see for his holding me in the office was to let someone rummage through my apartment at the hotel. I decided to get over there fast to check.

Just as I was opening the door to get in my Chevvie, I spotted old Father Hanrahan hurrying along. A sick call to some poor dying devil, I figured. I tipped my hat and offered the priest a lift. He said "thanks" and got in. I've known Father Hanrahan ever since the time he was a police chaplain.

I left him off in front of a gray, frame boarding house. I asked him if he'd like me to wait. "No, son," he said, "I never like to hurry a man's soul out of this world. You go right on ahead, but God bless you all the same."

I swung across town from the boarding house and parked in front of the hotel. I didn't have time to get out of the car before two men from homicide were on me; they hustled me without explanations into their car and drove me to headquarters.

There I got the reason and also there I began to put some pieces together. I was being hauled in for the murder of Doc Weston, whose body had been found in an alley on the West side of town with my wallet lying about ten feet away.

"What a plant, you dopes," I shouted; "can't you see?"

They didn't, even when I told the frozen-faced homicide squad men about my visit to Brooks Gaylord. They condescended to check my story. Gaylord denied everything I had said, with a big disarming smile.

I sweated through two hours of interrogatory crossfire. The detectives kept reminding me it was Weston's men who had tried to snatch me at the hotel the night before, when Sam Tighe was killed. They reminded me of the wallet at the scene of the crime. They reminded me of my newspaper story last night in which I predicted Weston's death.

They caustically reminded me how my story about being at Brooks Gaylord's office at the time of the killing had blown up in my face. Then to add the crusher, the homicide detectives brought in two witnesses who claimed seeing me at the scene of the crime.

It was a lovely frame, tailored to me with precision. I swore at the homicide men for being "fatuous fatheads" but all they did was laugh and tell me to own up and make a clean breast of everything. "Everything" I knew meant all the other killings. I was being sewed up proper; my heart sank to the slip knot on my shoelaces. Then Inspector Donohue walked in.

At first, I didn't know whether he was friend or foe. But within two minutes I knew for sure.

"Look at this picture, Harry," he said, showing a photograph of the corpse to one of the homicide boys; "see where Weston's head was bashed in?"

"Yes, the back of his head on the right side is caved in."

"That's the point, Harry; I've known Jim Connor here for years and he's always been left-handed."

"That's something, all right. If Connor did the job, the left side of the skull should show it."

"You're smart, Harry," Donohue said, winking over at me.

"Yes, but this doesn't make any difference; Connor could have done it with his right just to throw us off."

"What, a blow of that power with a hand he's not accustomed to using?"

"Anyway, Donohue, there's the matter of two witnesses."

"W i t n e s s e s?" Donohue echoed dumbfounded.

"Yes, that's right. They saw Connor at the scene of the killing."

Donohue was floored.

At that moment I remembered. "Father Hanrahan," I shouted; "he saw me. I met him outside Gaylord's."

"Is that on the level?" the detective called Harry asked. Calling on a retired police chaplain as an alibi startled him.

"The level, the level," Donohue mimicked impatiently. "Get on the phone and find out."

Harry came back into the room, his mouth sagging at the corners. "He's right; Father Hanrahan double-checks his story. I even got the time. Connor couldn't have done the killing."

"A frame," said Donohue.

Harry nodded and turned and walked deliberately into the next room where the witnesses sat. Ten minutes later he was back, slipping on his coat as he came in, his face set in a grim mask. "Some blonde gave these two fellows a hundred dollars each to say Connor was at the scene of the crime. She promised them two hundred each if Connor was convicted."

The blonde again! The answer to the underworld purge lay with her. I decided to do some slumming in the cheap dives and find out about the blonde from some tipster sources I had in them.

●

I SPENT three hours drinking rot gut and getting nothing in return till I arrived at *The Devil's Shamrock*. There I ran into Goo Goo Flynn of the bulging eyes, the leathery dewlap and the palsied hands. He was deep in his cups and voluble. He worked for a living as a runner in the policy game.

"How's business, 'Goo Goo'?"

"Never been so good, so good. Here have a drink with me," he flashed a roll of bills. "A good friend. Long time no see. Drink, sure, eh."

"How's the blonde?" I shot in suddenly, toying with a glass of the bar's best poison.

"Ain't she something, though." Goo Goo pursed his lips in a futile attempt at a whistle.

"What's she call herself?" I tried to be casual.

"Waitaminute, friend. You aren't pumping me, are you? I don't like that, see. I know you newspaper fellows. Always pumping, pumping." His cracked voice broke into a sing-song as he waved his glass in a jagged tempo, spilling some of the rot gut on the bar.

I waited till he quieted down, then asked him the sixty-four dollar question. "Who's *The Pig?*"

He choked on his drink. "Listen, friend. It isn't healthy for you to ask such questions, or for me even to listen to 'em." Goo Goo banged his glass down on the bar and with a wave of his hand stumbled towards the door and out of *The Devil's Shamrock*.

I finished my drink and paid the bartender. After the evening of cautious tippling my stomach felt as if it were filled with acid and my eyes blinked and watered. To say nothing of how my head felt. The stuff these dives served up could have powered a rocket to the moon with ease. I set my hat straight and with fierce determination started on a straight line for the door. But the muscles in my legs were limp wires and my gait was defiantly unsteady.

That woozy walk probably saved my life. Just as I got to the door something zinged by my head, grazing my ear; I had the presence of mind to pull back and flatten myself against the wall.

After a few moments I stole a look out on the street dimly lit by the street lamp. No one was in sight except a woman pushing a baby-carriage, just disappearing around the cor-

ner. There was something familiar about that tall figure.

I WAS TOO jittery to risk going out of the bar alone. I called Inspector Donohue, who picked me up in a police car and all but tucked me into bed back in the hotel. I gulped down a bromo and sank into a leaden slumber, haunted by an endless shadowy procession of baby carriages pushed by blondes.

The raucous telephone at my bedside shattered the incubus. Bemis Harrington's voice boomed like a rolling artillery barrage. "If you're going to stay on the job, Connor, then get on the job. It's almost noon."

"All right, all right," I said, massaging my throbbing head; "I'll be down in an hour."

"Never mind coming down here. Get over to Dyckman Square. Someone just got Ma Boland in the broad daylight."

I dropped the receiver, hustled into my clothes and raced out on the street to hail a cab, still buttoning my shirt, a tie flying free over my arm. I couldn't be bothered with my Chevvie in a garage three blocks away.

At Dyckman Square the cops were having a time with the morbid crowd. Donohue was standing over the body, studying the bullet wounds, then questioning some bystanders and all the time jotting squibs in his note book. I tried to elbow my way to him through the press of people, ignoring the bellicose corner-of-the-mouth mumblings of "Where d'ja think yuh going, wise guy?"

Suddenly I stopped; on the outskirts of the crowd I saw the blonde pushing a baby carriage, and on impluse I waved to her. Then the coincidence struck me. What was she doing over here, at a murder, at the other end of town from where I met her at the Rocky Bynner killing? She'd have to do an awful lot of walking with that carriage to get over here. And a girl decked out like her doesn't do that kind of walking.

I began pushing my way back through the muttering throng. As soon as she saw me coming, the blonde spun the carriage around and sped off at an undignified dog-trot. I redoubled my off-tackle slants through the grudging curiosity seekers. I wanted to catch up with that blonde. She had been cropping up too often in the events of the past two days to be ignored.

She was just disappearing around the corner with the baby carriage when I broke out of the mob. At that moment it came to me: last night after those shots in the *Devil's* I had glimpsed the same scene when I looked out on the dimly lighted street. Why, the cheap little murdering hussy; I'd twist her lovely white neck to the four points of the compass and back around again.

I sprinted after her, broken-field running through the fresh onslaught of curious people. I whirled around the corner in a wide arc, barely balancing myself o the curb; the girl was nowhere in sight.

It was a grubby side-street lined with old warehouses and a few shabby tenements that were probably too rat-ridden to serve as warehouses, with here and there a small store between. I walked along slowly, peering in at windows and doorways. A lone kid was tossing a ball against a blank stretch of warehouse wall. "See anything of a girl with a carriage?" I asked.

The kid nodded. "Sure; she went in the candy store over there."

"Thanks." I walked back slowly up the block to the store the kid pointed out. I went in casually. A small, bald shopkeeper looked up at me over the rims of his glasses.

"Cigarettes," I said, throwing a quarter on the counter. Out of the side of my eye I could see the blonde trying to hide herself away in the corner of the rack of comic-books.

I lit up a cigarette and strolled over. "We've met before, you know," I said, standing in front of her, my hands idling with the handle of the baby carriage behind me.

"I never saw you before, mister." The hard glitter in her eyes didn't go with the cute face.

"Come now, think hard."

"I don't make friends with nosey reporters." Her ripe red lips curled in a sneer.

"Oh, so you know who I am," I exclaimed, dropping my nonchalance. "Your boss probably told you. Who is he?" I gripped her arm. "Come on. Spill."

The hardness faded out of her eyes. She was scared now. She kept looking over my shoulder at the carriage. Such motherly solicitude, I thought cynically.

"Come on, Beautiful, whom are you working for?"

She tore herself loose. "Watch your step, Wise Aleck."

I pushed my face belligerently into hers. "Is it *The Pig?*"

I only glimpsed the beginnings of fear on her face. The next instant something smashed down on my skull and the world exploded into a shower of stars. Then darkness fell.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN THE darkness cleared an excited kid was in the shop with a policeman. But they weren't looking at me behind the counter. I struggled up to my feet and wobbled over to them. The little shopkeeper lay crumpled, with three bullets in him.

That posed a riddle for my aching head. I was the bigger danger to *The Pig*, or so I figured.

But wait a minute. I hadn't seen my assailant; the shopkeeper had. That had been his death-warrant. *The Pig* was mystery and wanted to stay that way.

I had been struck from behind, from the direction of the baby carriage. The carriage again; always the carriage. In the back of my head a suspicion began to grow...

I held it back when Donohue questioned me about the happenings in the little candy store. The blonde interested him, too; he agreed with me that finding her might crack the case wide open. Inside two hours he had her address from one of his stoolies. It was a downtown number in a rundown part of town, but when Donohue's men broke into the apartment, they found elegantly furnished rooms, an oasis of gracious living in the midst of slums.

"She's gone," Donohue exclaimed disgustedly as he stalked through the empty rooms.

"Probably has her own stoolies, too," I said, checking the closets. They had been cleaned out. Only a few wire hangers dangled inside. I wandered about the apartment, examining the heaps of paper and boxes scattered here and there. In one heap I caught sight of a white cloth. I picked it up and shook it out; it was a child's dress with a piece missing from the edge. I stuffed it in my pocket. Back in the hotel, I had that piece of cloth Donohue had found in the dumbwaiter of the tenement flat of the slain Rocky Bynner. I was sure it would match the gap in the dress.

It did. I was excited now, more and more certain that my hunch about *The Pig*, and I got still further confirmation after I spent two hours talking with Pat Harris, the veteran book-

ing agent. I felt then I even had the real name of *The Pig*. And of the blonde.

I PHONED Donohue. "Inspector, I got this thing all figured out."

At the other end Donohue's voice was dry and "you-don't-say" in tone.

"Listen," I said, "I'm going to lay a trap for *The Pig* tonight."

"With cheese, I supose."

"No, no," I said disgustedly. "It's something I'm going to put in my story in the *Star* tonight."

"Some touching moralization, no doubt, that will bring him weeping to the nearest precinct."

"Very funny!"

"I'm sorry, Jim. But if you know, who is *The Pig*?"

"I'll give you a clue. *The Pig* is a shortened version of his original nickname. Think of some words beginning with 'pig'."

"Pig-headed, pigeon," Donohue said between pauses.

"Keep trying. But have some men covering my apartment tonight and you'll get the killer."

"I'll string along, Jim, even if I'm there for the laughs." The bantering tone had a note of worry. Donohue knew I didn't fool when I went after a criminal.

"Is it 'pigment'?" Donohue made a last guess before hanging up.

●

The *Star* bannerlined my story in the evening editions on the front page. In the very first paragraph I put in the bait to trap the killer.

NEW UNDERWORLD KING'S IDENTITY TO BE REVEALED

James Connor

In a wave of hoodlum slayings a killer has ascended the Devil's Throne as king of our city's underworld. He goes by the name of "The Pig." By tomorrow this reporter will be able to reveal the true identity of "The Pig". And don't be surprised if he isn't so big after all.

●

That night, in my two and a half room apartment in the Alton hotel. I looked behind the furniture, and under the bed, and tested the doors, making ready for the visitor I was certain would come. I armed myself with a heavy piece of pipe I had got from the hotel porter.

Only a fly could scale to my windows on the tenth floor, but I wasn't taking chances anyway. I balanced some cocktail-glasses delicately on the window-frame near the locked catches. Anyone forcing the windows would wake the dead with the clatter of shattered glass.

I sat back in an armchair close to the wall, where I could watch everything. At first I was relaxed, enjoying the adventure. I had spotted two of Donohue's men on guard, one furtively patrolling the corridor, the other watching my room from the security of a broom closet, and I felt safe.

But as the hours passed and the city noises faded into the late night silence I grew uneasy. Several times my nerves played me tricks and sent me around the rooms to investigate one of those noises a building seems to creak with at night.

About midnight a knock came on the door. I unhooked the phone and told the switchboard girl to listen in and be ready to call the cops.

Gripping the lead-pipe, I opened the door cautiously.

It was Inspector Donohue. He grinned at the sight of my plumbing weapon. "I thought so," he said, reaching in his pocket and pulling out a revolver. "So I brought you this. I'll feel easier in my mind if you're armed."

Before he left, he made an inspection of the apartment. When he checked the windows and saw my cocktail burglar-alarm, he laughed. "That's a new one on me."

I STAYED up for an hour after Donohue left and then wearily

crawled into bed, slipping the Weston under my pillow. I could barely keep my eyes open. I was too tired to be afraid. In a few minutes I was in deep slumber.

Crash! Crash! Tinkle! I shot bolt upright in my bed. The windows!

I leaped out of bed and raced into the living-room. A draft of cold air caught me full in the face and at the same time I saw a short dark blur moving over the window.

There was a lethally familiar motion in the actions of the figure now. Instinctively I dove behind a chair as a noiseless spurt of flame stabbed in the darkness towards me; I swore at myself for forgetting the gun under the pillow.

My eyes noted the dangling rope framed in the window and then focused in the darkness for the prowling killer.

Suddenly a storm of shouts and banging broke loose as Donohue's men batted on the door and called out for me to answer.

I started to yell but my mouth froze in the middle of its motion. A tiny voice nearby shrilled softly, "Where are you, Wise Guy? I'll kill you."

He came closer, too close. I jumped up and lunged desperately for my bedroom and the gun in the bed. A bullet from the assassin's silencer whipped by me. I fell flat to the floor, waiting in a cold sweat to die but hoping that my 'possum act would work.

The door gave way from the pounding. *Help at last,* I thought with a sweep of relief. But two clicks echoed metallicly, and I heard the two plainclothesmen thud to the floor with barely a groan.

Desperate now, like a cornered animal, I was up on my feet and into the bedroom, clawing at my pillow. I swung around with the Weston ready to blaze away at the killer. But he hadn't followed; he must have fallen for my corpse routine and beaten it after shooting the police.

I raced out into the living-room. Framed in the window and slowly rising out of sight was a childish form. I ran over and grasped an ankle. The free leg struck out at me viciously, grazing my chin. I shifted the gun to get it by the barrel and cracked it against the knee of the dangling figure. There was a sound of shattered bone.

A squeal of sharp pain followed and the figure slipped down the rope into my arms, its grip loosened by an agony of pain. It was a dwarf!

He struggled but the pain left him an easy foe. I dragged him whimpering to the phone. Suddenly the lights blazed on, blinding me momentarily.

"Drop it," a cold feminine voice knifed from the doorway. The baby carriage blonde—I should have expected as much. She had been the one working the rope for the midget from the upstairs apartment. When things went wrong, she had come down.

I put the phone back in the cradle.

"The gun, too."

But I was too smart for that. Dropping the gun would admit me to the nearest cemetery. Already I saw the midget painfully maneuvering to get his silencer out of his coat pocket.

I acted as to throw the Weston down, but instead I fell forward in a line between the girl and the midget, pulling the trigger as I did.

Only one shot echoed in the room; smoke curled from the girl's gun. I stared at mine. I had forgotten the safety—or rather Donohue had forgotten to remind me about it.

BEHIND me I heard a rasping throaty rattle. The blonde's shot had got the midget. She rushed over past me. I turned; the midget was bubbling blood at the mouth. The blonde lifted him up sobbing, "Joey, Joey..." The little body stiffened in a spasm of pain and then life was gone. I watched spellbound, the gun loose in my hand.

The blonde's eyes turned on me,

burning with hate. She swung her gun on me. Pulling my trigger, I suddenly realized, would be futile; the safety was still on. I flipped the gun with all the power of my wrists at her face. It struck her just as she fired and the bullet went wild.

She didn't have a chance to fire again; Donohue had come into the room and snatched the gun from her.

"I got up here as soon as I could, Jim," he said. "I was watching downstairs in the lobby when someone phoned all hell had broken loose up here."

"Thanks," I said, going over to the liquor to pour myself a drink. There's *The Pig*," I said, planking myself down in a chair and waving my glass in the direction of the dead midget.

"*The Pig*," Donohue repeated incredulously. This little man had tried to become king of the underworld, sit on the Devil's throne!

"Yes, Donohue. 'Pig' as in 'Pygmy'. He's Joey Bates, billed one time with the Norris Circus as 'The Pygmy', the world's smallest midget."

Donohue looked over at the blonde. "Her?"

"His sister."

The Inspector's eyebrows went up.

"Sure. Midget parents can sometimes have normal children."

"He and his sister used to work in the circus. I found that out from Harris, the booking agent, this morning. They worked a few rackets on the side too: shakedowns, blackmail. Probably that's what gave them the idea to try to take over the town."

Donohue picked up the midget's silencer gun. "A forty-five. That's the caliber that did the killings, all right. Is that right, lady?" he said, turning to the blonde who was staring in mute agony at the corpse of the little man. She nodded dumbly.

"I guess that sews it up, Jim. But what put you on to this guy?"

"First, the baby-carriage; it was cropping up all the time. Why use a

baby-carriage, I asked myself? Suddenly it dawned on me that maybe it was being used to transport the killer about, and in that case the killer had to be a midget. It was an ideal wrinkle. She'd push the carriage into a house or down an alley. The little man hopped out, did his dirty work, came out and was trundled off in his carriage."

"You have it pegged right, Jim. That explains the open doors and windows at Rocky Bynner's murder; the midget didn't want us to learn he had come into the apartment by the dumbwaiter and gotten away the same way."

"And you threw away a clue in that piece of cloth. Luckily I kept it because I found a torn child's dress in the blonde's apartment and the piece matched the tear."

Donohue scratched his head in embarrassment. "Well, sometimes the gods do nod."

I GRUNTED. "By the way, I wonder who put the bug in the midget's ear to try to frame me for the killings. It was a stupid move."

"Not so stupid, Jim; it almost worked. And I think I know who was behind it. Denvers in City Hall. He never forgave you for the clean-up job you did on his old pals in that newspaper series of yours."

"That makes sense, Donohue. What are you going to do about him?"

"Pick him up for questioning. If we can break that old rum-soak Gaylord down, we'll probably be able to charge Denvers with conspiracy."

By now the apartment was filled with cops and morgue men. Reporters

were crowding at the door. But I invoked the inviolability of a man's home to keep them out until I had phoned in the story to the *Star*, which put out an extra.

Then I let them in and answered their questions and offered them some drinks. That soothed their ruffled journalistic feelings.

"Now, gentlemen," I said finally, holding my hands up for silence. "You better get; I need a good night's sleep. I'm flying to the East coast tomorrow to catch a plane to Europe."

Somebody cracked "Wanna bet," as they all filed out.

I phoned the airlines office. I had till one o'clock in the afternoon before my plane left. I opened all the windows, swept up the shattered cocktail glasses and went to sleep. The phone blared and burrowed into my slumber at eleven o'clock. My hand grasped blindly before I picked up the receiver.

"Great story, wonderful story, Connor." It was the Great One himself, McGregor.

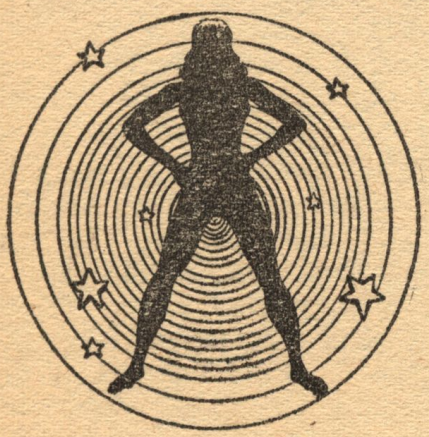
"Thanks, Mr. McGregor, but all I want now is sleep. I'm due to get a plane at one o'clock. I have about an hour sleep coming." I started to hang up but McGregor's frantic cries restrained me.

"I want you to make a junket of all our big cities and do a post-Kefauver story on them. There's a good bonus in it," he said.

"Money can't buy everything," I said pompously and put the phone down. "Europe here I come," I muttered as I spun myself in the blankets. I shut my eyes but my brain remained wide awake. A post-Kefauver story—a good idea. A damn good idea. I could open the series with a double take on the so-called reform measures of certain western cities; then I could follow up with what the Income Tax people are doing about the underworld's tax returns. Yes, it was a swell idea.

I reached for the phone and dialed. "McGregor," I said, "when do I start that junket?"

●



An Unusual Feature
Novel of Other Worlds

QUEST OF THE QUEEN

by Ross Linden

Chris Lane follows a hunch his reason tells him to be romantic nonsense into a startling biological discovery, and an amazing interplanetary quest—the quest of Myrna!

leads off the January issue of

FUTURE
Science Fiction Stories

THE DEADLY DAILY

By Aaron Holm

AT MIDNIGHT the big park was quiet and almost deserted. Surrounded by the tall man-hives of the city, it was an island of green fragrant beauty. Scattered lamps made pools of light in the warm summer night; elsewhere, trees and shrubbery cast dark shadows.

A small woman in dark clothing walked rapidly along a curving path. She carried a bulky rolled newspaper. A trash container stood beside the path at a point where a high privet hedge made the dim night darker. The woman hesitated and cast a furtive glance about; then she thrust the paper into the container and walked rapidly away.

A tall slender man emerged from a clump of bushes and walked down a gentle grassy slope toward the rubbish box. The woman who had gone about twenty paces looked back when she heard feet crush the gravel of the path. She darted into the shelter of a lilac bush and watched the slender man take the rolled paper from the box and start back up the slope. A much larger man pushed through the privet hedge and overtook the other with long strides. The slender man whirled to find the big fellow covering him with a gun. "Give me that paper," the armed man snarled.

At the sound of the big man's voice, the woman drew a sharp breath and stepped from hiding. The slender man's hand extended the paper and the other reached for it. The slender man's foot flashed upward and kicked the hand that held the gun. Then the edge of the slender man's

He wanted a newspaper to look at the want-ads, and Martin naturally picked one out of the trash-basket. But this newspaper was deadly—it plunged him into a kidnaping rap!

The big man's gun went flying...

hand knifed the air and struck the big man's throat. The stricken man's knees buckled and he fell, gasping; the gun thudded on the sod. The slender man was stooping to pick up the weapon when the running woman flung herself furiously upon him. They sprawled together on the grass.

The big man scrambled to his knees and crawled, clawing for the gun. The slender man flung the woman's small form aside and, still prone, kicked the big man in the face. Then the slender man was on his feet, covering the others with the weapon. The big man came groggily to his feet. His cheek was bleeding where the shoe heel had struck. The woman moved to his side and clung to his arm. The newspaper lay on the grass. Bands of scotch tape held it snugly rolled.

"I tried to catch him, Reba," the big man groaned.

"You two stand still," the slender

man ordered; "what's this all about?" His voice was grim and he held the gun as though he knew how to use it.

"Please, mister," the woman ceased sobbing to beg, "take the money and go before the police come. I didn't know Ralph was going—"

"What money?" the slender man cut her off.

"It's in the paper—just like you said," the woman panted. "Five thousand dollars. And I didn't tell the police. Take it and go—and please don't hurt my baby. I didn't—"

Feet pounded the path. The beam of an electric torch found the embattled trio. "Drop that gun," a dark policeman ordered from behind the torch. "Drop it, I say!"

"I'm on your side, officer," the slender man said as he let the gun fall, "but you'd better take us all in. Something is snafu. This woman says there is five thousand dollars in that newspaper there on the ground."

"Stand still, all of you," the policeman ordered as he raised a whistle to his lips.

●

CAPTAIN DAN BRADY, solid, beefy and gruff, sat behind his desk at police headquarters. The newspaper, unrolled before Brady, was covered with twenty and fifty-dollar bills. Two uniformed officers stood guard beside the office door. A Western Union clock on the wall registered ten minutes before one a.m.

The woman sat in a straight chair at one end of Captain Brady's desk. She was about thirty, attractive, despite tear swollen eyes and rumpled clothing. Her face was drawn with anxiety; misery looked from her dark eyes. She had identified herself as Mrs. Rebecca Lane, widowed by world war two and proprietress of a real estate and rental agency.

The big man stood behind the woman's chair in a protective attitude. He wore a conservative business suit. The left cheek of his heavily handsome face was swollen and turning blue about a gash that had stopped bleeding. He was Ralph Franklin, assistant to Mrs. Lane; he scowled darkly at the slender man who stood facing Brady across the money littered desk.

The slender man had given his name as Howard Martin, thirty-three years old. He was clean but shabby in corduroys and a shirt of faded gray flannel. His shoes were scuffed. His thick hair was red brown and wavy. There was a day's beard on his tanned face. The fact that it did not move betrayed his left eye as artificial.

"You stuck this money in the trash box?" Captain Brady asked Mrs. Lane.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"To get my little boy back," Mrs. Lane replied. "Please do something about that, Captain. Time is being wasted. My baby was kidnaped early this—" she glanced at the clock, "yesterday afternoon. I got a note—"

"Captain," Ralph Franklin broke in impatiently, "Mrs. Lane's son may be in grave danger. The first thing to do is to make this fellow tell where the child is being held and—"

"I'm the cop," Brady snapped; "I don't tell people how to sell real estate."

Franklin subsided.

"You, Martin," Brady barked. "You came for the money; the quicker you tell us how to find the boy the easier it wil be on you."

"Captain," Martin said earnestly. "I had nothing to do with any kidnaping. I have no idea where the child is or who stole him. I wish I had—"

"Captain," one of the officers at the door broke in, "let me take this guy downstairs and talk to him—privately. I've got a couple of kids and—"

"I'll handle this," Brady stopped him. "I don't want anybody talking any more except when I say so; that means you, too, Connors."

The officer remained silent, glaring

at Martin's back. Brady's angry eyes went back to Martin.

"Talk, you," Brady snarled; "where's the kid?"

MARTIN'S lips tightened, but he spoke calmly. "Mrs. Lane told you that her boy was taken soon after one o'clock and—"

"So I suppose you've got an alibi," Brady snorted.

"At that time I was more than a hundred miles from here—hitch hiking this way," Martin affirmed. "I can prove it if—"

"So you can prove it," Brady snapped. "So you hooked up with your gang in a hurry. You came for the ransom dough. Where's the boy?"

"I didn't hook up with anybody," Martin denied patiently; "and I am in no way concerned with the kidnaping."

"I suppose you just went to that trash box to get a newspaper," Brady barked.

"That's right," Martin nodded; "I just wanted a newspaper."

"I suppose you were going to sit there in the dark and read?" Sarcasm dripped from Brady's voice.

"Officer," Martin glanced at the park policeman who had been brought along as the arresting officer, "how many men are sleeping in the park tonight, with old newspapers among some bushes for a mattress?"

"Plenty," the officer muttered.

Howard Martin turned back to Brady. "I got to town too late to look for work," he explained. "I had only eighty cents left—and I needed that for food until I find some sort of a job in the morning. So I went to the park to sleep. I found a thicket that was not occupied, but the ground was bare. I went looking for some newspaper to keep my clothes as clean as possible."

"Neat feller," Brady grunted, "but not fussy about where you sleep."

"I've slept in much worse places," Martin smiled, "in much worse weather. I was just coming out of the thicket when I saw Mrs. Lane put a bulky paper in the box. I walked down and got the paper; then this man jumped me with a gun," he nodded toward Franklin.

"And you put up a fight against a gun—just for an old newspaper," Brady glared.

"I don't like to be pushed around," Martin replied crisply. "He got too close to me; I learned what to do about that in the army."

Mrs. Lane's eyes, fixed on Martin's face, held a puzzled expression.

"That yarn," Captain Brady snorted, "is as phony as a Russian peace offer. It stinks. Maybe I'd better let Connors talk to you downstairs."

MARTIN'S chin came forward. "I've told you the truth," he declared. "I'm neither a kidnaper nor a gangster; I'm just broke and hunting a job. This crockery eye won't let me back in the army. I lost the eye in the wreck of a freight train, six months after I was discharged, riding in a boxcar. I worked in the lumber woods until May. I left there with eight hundred dollars and started east, hunting something better. In Detroit, I was [illegible] by three men who broke into my hotel room and slugged me. I had heard that there were plenty of jobs here, so I hit the road. Just before noon yesterday, a man picked me up in his car. We had lunch in Fairport. He was a slow driver and we didn't get here until five o'clock. The man was a veterinary, coming home from a convention. I can find him and prove what I've said, but it will take time—and too much time has been wasted already. If you will let me ask Mrs. Lane a few questions, I think I can learn where her little boy is being held."

"So now you're a detective," Brady sniffed. "Maybe *I* snatched the kid."

"I've remembered something that may unravel this," Martin declared.

Captain Brady noticed the puzzled

manner in which Mrs. Lane kept looking at Martin.

"Do you know this fellow, Mrs. Lane?" Brady asked abruptly.

"His face seems familiar," Mrs. Lane nodded. "I'm sure I never met him, but I must have seen him somewhere."

"Probably watching around for a chance to grab your boy," Brady said.

Mrs. Lane shook her head. "He says he has just arrived in the city—and I believe him; I don't think he had anything to do with stealing my son. He must just resemble—"

"I don't think Mrs. Lane has ever seen me in person until now," Martin cut in.

"In the movies, maybe?" Brady grunted. "An actor, yet. Quite a feller to be roosting in parks."

"No," Martin smiled, "Mrs. Lane did not see me in the movies, nor on television. But you're getting warmer. I know Mrs. Lane in a way; I've been sure of it since she told you her son's name. There couldn't be two Rebecca Lanes in the world—each with a son named Laban. Wasn't your husband's name Gordon, Mrs. Lane?"

"Yes," she cried. "You knew Gordon?"

"He sent you a picture of his s[illegible]d—taken on Saipan," Martin replied; "I'm in the picture."

Remembrance registered on Mrs. Lane's face. "Of course!" she gasped. "You're the one he called Slivers. Slivers Martin."

"That's right," Martin nodded. "And I didn't kidnap your son. But I think I can find him for you, if you will answer some questions for me."

"I'll ask—" Captain Brady began.

"Please let him try, Captain," Mrs. Lane interrupted. "He is the first to offer to do anything about finding Laban."

RALPH FRANKLIN was glaring at Martin, his fingers touching his injured face.

Captain Brady leaned back in his swivel chair. "Go ahead, Martin," he grunted. He was beginning to wonder about this shabby one-eyed chap.

"Just how were the kidnapers able to steal your son?" Martin asked Mrs. Lane.

"We live in an apartment facing the park," she explained. "I pay Mrs. Barnes—a woman who lives across the hall—to look after Laban while I am at the office. On nice days, she takes him across the street and lets him play in the park for an hour or two, while she does her marketing and mine. Today—yesterday she took him there as usual. At about one o'clock, she said."

"And then, as you told the police, you got a note at about two o'clock, saying that the boy had been kidnaped—and demanding ransom?"

"Yes."

"Fast work," Martin commented. "How was the note delivered?"

"A messenger brought it to the office while I was out for lunch. Mr. Franklin stayed with the office. The envelope was marked personal. Mr. Franklin signed for it and gave it to me when I returned."

"You have the note?" Martin asked.

"No; we burned it after we read it. The note said I should destroy it and not call the police—if I wanted to see my baby alive again." Mrs. Lane's voice broke slightly, but she was not the type for hysterics.

"Was the note typewritten?"

"No, it was printed in pencil on plain paper."

"And it ordered you to wrap five thousand dollars in a newspaper and put it in that trash container at midnight?"

"Yes," Mrs. Lane nodded. "It said the first box inside the park entrance, at the end of the privet hedge. I talked it over with Mr. Franklin and we decided it would be best to do exactly as the note said. So I telephoned to Mrs. Barnes—"

"Why?"

"The note said I should call her and tell her that I had picked Laban up in the park and was going to take him to the country over night."

"She was at home," Martin asked, "and hadn't missed your boy?"

"She didn't answer the phone," Mrs. Lane explained, "so I called the janitor. He caught Mrs. Barnes coming in with the groceries and had her call me."

"I see," Martin said. "Then you went to the bank and got the money. A sizeable cash withdrawal."

"I frequently draw large sums," Mrs. Lane told him. "Many deals are made for cash nowadays, the deed showing one dollar and other considerations."

"So you got the cash. Then what?"

"WE MADE up the package at the office. We had some sandwiches and coffee sent up later and stayed there until nearly midnight. Then Mr. Franklin drove me to the park entrance in my car. The path described in the note enters the park directly across from my apartment; my instructions were to put the paper with the money inside into the box and walk on across the park to the other side. Mr. Franklin said he would drive around the park and meet me. I didn't know—"

"I thought it best," Franklin cut in, "not to let Mrs. Lane know that I intended to try to capture the kidnaper."

"Save it," Martin snapped, "until I finish talking with Mrs. Lane. How far had you gone, Mrs. Lane, when I came to the trash box?"

"Only a short way. I looked back and saw you, but it was too dark to see very well. You started away and Mr. Franklin came through the hedge and stopped you. I recognized his voice. Then you hit him and—"

"And you came to his rescue." A faint smile tugged at Martin's lips. "For a lightweight, you throw a corking body block."

"This fellow," Franklin snarled, "is just stalling for time."

"Oh, no, I'm not," Martin retorted; "I'm in a hurry. Captain Brady, would a kidnaper have come for the ransom money before Mrs. Lane was out of sight?"

Brady's brows puckered. "Maybe not," he growled. "Just what are you beating the bushes for?"

"You'll see a skunk come out of them shortly," Martin promised. "Mrs. Lane, did Franklin stay with you all the time after he gave you the ranson note?"

"Yes; he even went to the bank with me."

"Did Franklin know that Mrs. Barnes took care of your little boy and left him to play in the park as you have said?"

"Are you accusing me of kidnaping the boy?" Franklin demanded belligerently. "I can prove—"

"I know what you can prove," Martin cut him off, "and what you can't. You've been very anxious to get me locked up, so you could have a chance to run for it; you're not going to make it."

"Why you—" Franklin began.

"Captain Brady," Martin snapped, "if you'll keep Franklin quiet, I'll give you the picture of this very sloppy job—and we'll locate the boy much sooner."

"Shut up, Franklin," Brady ordered; "this better be good, Martin."

"It will be accurate," Martin promised. "From where I stand, it's like reading a primer."

"I'm listening," Brady grunted. "Start reading."

"CAN YOU prove that you were in Mrs. Lane's office all the time she was gone to lunch?" Martin shot the question at Franklin.

"Yes, I can," Franklin declared "The door was open and—" he stopped abruptly, glaring at Martin.

"You blundered into it," Martin smiled grimly. "You took care to be

able to prove you were there; you weren't worried about having to prove that there was a messenger, because you would be gone."

"That's a lie," Franklin spat, "I can prove—"

"You can't," Martin contradicted, "but there's no use to waste time letting you try." Martin's gaze went back to Captain Brady. "Franklin printed that note himself, then he got rid of it as soon as Mrs. Lane had read it. By staying close to Mrs. Lane from then on, he made sure it would be safe to follow her into the park and pick up the money. That privet hedge made that handy. But, because I needed a mattress, I gummed up his—"

"This is preposterous," Franklin yelled.

"Shut up," Brady snapped. "Go on, Martin; what put you onto this?"

"Franklin said just four words to me in the park," Martin replied. "Can you repeat them, Mrs. Lane?"

Hope had began to dawn on Mrs. Lane's face. "He said, *'give me that paper'*," she replied promptly.

"Notice, Captain," Martin said, "that Franklin didn't try to hold me; he only wanted the money. I had upset his plans. All he could do was grab the money from me and run for it."

"He's trying to—" Franklin croaked.

"Shut up," Brady roared. "Okay, Martin, you've made some points; where's the boy?"

"With an accomplice," Martin replied. "Franklin had an alibi for the time of the kidnaping, so there's an accomplice. It had to be a person that the boy knew well enough to trust, otherwise, the child could not have been taken from the park at that hour without attracting attention. Perhaps Mrs. Lane knows someone connected with Franklin who fits the specifications."

"Anna Neville," Mrs. Lane exclaimed.

"Reba," Franklin cried hoarsely, "you don't—"

"Connors," Brady barked, "if Franklin makes another peep before I tell him to, conk him."

The husky Connors moved hopefully to Franklin's side. Franklin licked his lips and remained silent. Mrs. Lane ignored him, watching Howard Martin eagerly.

"Who is Anna Neville?" Martin asked.

"Franklin's fiancee," Mrs. Lane answered. "They have often visited us—several times for Sunday dinner. Laban likes Anna."

"Would he have willingly left the park with her?"

"Yes—if she told him I had sent her."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"Yes. She has an apartment about four blocks up the drive from mine." Mrs. Lane gave the number.

"That is probably where you will find the boy, Captain," Martin said, "and the other kidnaper."

CAPTAIN BRADY picked up a telephone.

"Wait," Franklin croaked.

Officer Connors eagerly swung a huge fist. It missed, but Franklin almost fell down dodging.

"Hold it, Connors," Brady snapped; "let him talk."

Connors looked sorrowfully at the fist that had failed to connect. Franklin's face was pasty gray, fear crawling across it. He was trembling. "If you go there," Franklin gasped, "the boy may get—hurt; he might be killed."

"Who's with the boy?" Brady glared at the quaking kidnaper.

"Anna," Franklin replied; "and she—well—she might do anything. She has seven thousand dollars that she took from the finance company where she works. She has a gun, too. She won't be taken easily; this was all her idea."

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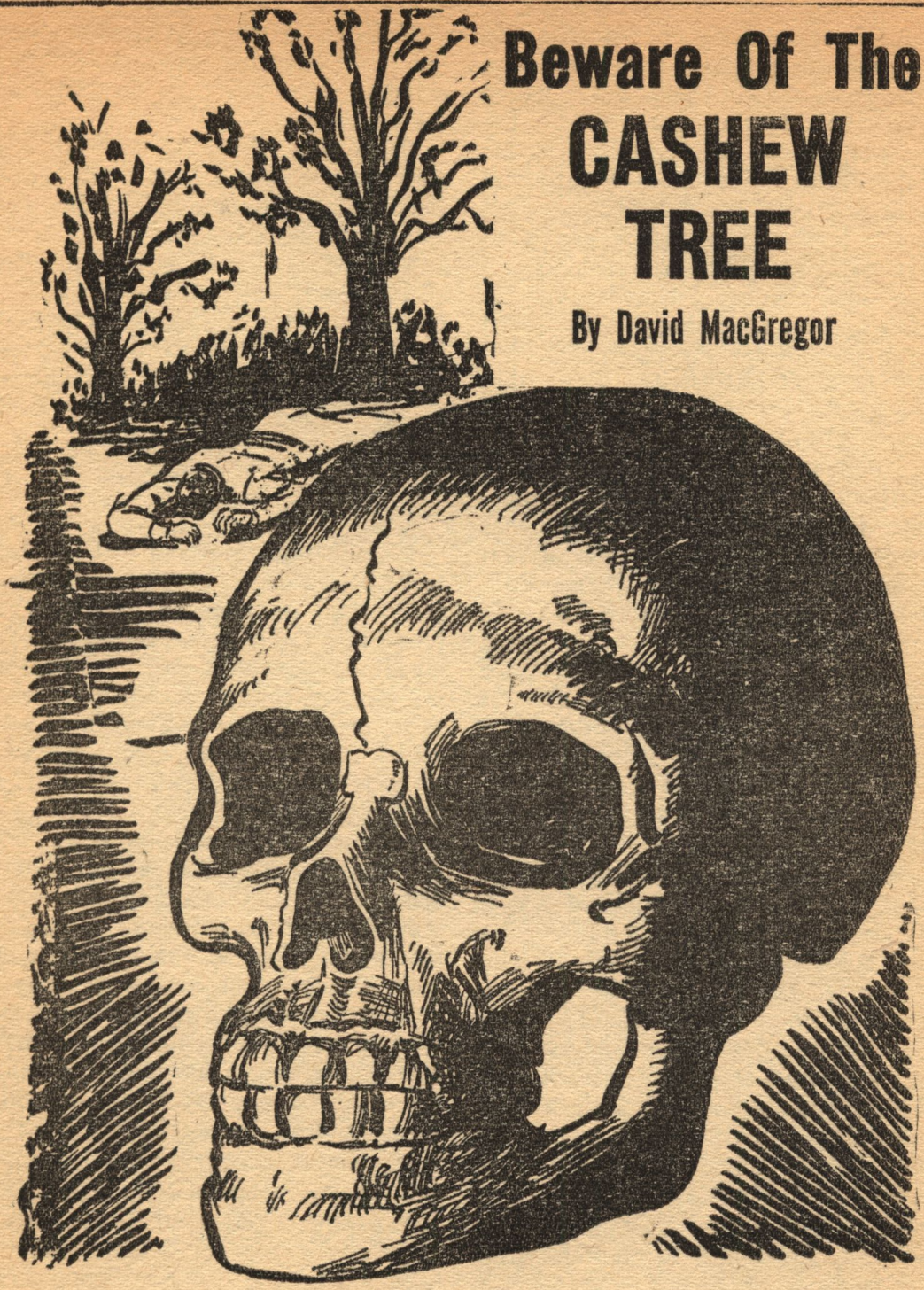
● AN ARCHIE McCANN NOVELET . . . .

Beware Of The CASHEW TREE

By David MacGregor



McCann knew this boy, Cham, and the odds were good that he was being framed for the murder of his girl's father. Yet, Cham had good reason to wish the old man dead, and, for the first time, the boy wasn't telling McCann the whole truth!

WHEN Archibald Sylvester Brewster McCann learned that old Namdangku, chief of the Sepik River patrilineal clan of Melanesians in New Guinea, had died from the sting of a scorpion, he didn't know whether to feel relieved or distressed.

The hot noon-day sun beat down on the motionless palm trees sheltering McCann's thatched hut in the native village of Tambu, about five miles west of the city of Marienberg on the Sepik River. Mosquitoes whined and swarmed outside his mosquito-netted bunk. He had been half asleep when his native house-boy had come in and told him about old Namdangku. He stretched his lanky body lazily, rolled over on his face, and decided that he felt a bit distressed to know that the kindly, yet cantankerous, old dogmatist had died.

Although Namdangku had been a continual source of trouble and annoyance to the Australian authorities ever since 1919, when the League of Nations had mandated the German-held territory in New Guinea to Australia, nevertheless, McCann—secret agent for the British in the mandated territory—had always been able to persuade the old chief to do the things that the British and Australians had wanted him to do. McCann had acquired a real liking for the old martinet.

Old Namdangku had always insisted that he was a loyal subject of Kaiser Wilhelm, and had refused to recognize the Australian and British authority under the League's mandate; yet because of the fact that he also had come to respect and admire McCann, he made occasional concessions with his loyalty and obeyed the British decrees, assuaging his conscience by saying that he was actually doing it for his good friend, Massa McCann.

Two days after Namdangku was properly consigned to the life after death according to the witch doctor's ritual, McCann received an urgent message from Jason French, Commissioner of Native Affairs at Marienberg, requesting him to come immediately to Ambunti; old Namdangku had been murdered, and French believed McCann's services were needed because French suspected that one of the police boys at Ambunti was the murderer.

McCann grunted irritatedly when he read French's message. "What name of police boy?" he demanded of the messenger.

"Him name, Cham Ngwai," said the messenger. "Him say me tell good Massa McCann come quick. Him say him no kill Namdangku."

McCann scowled thoughtfully. Cham Ngwai was well known to him; Cham had been a special protege of McCann's. Ngwai was the son of the Papuan chief Cavi of his own village of Tambu, and was a good boy. "All right," he said abruptly. "I'll go."

●

Years before, McCann had decided to become a doctor of medicine. After graduating from medical school, he found that the duties of a doctor were much too strenuous and onerous for his indolent nature. He next decided to try out the legal profession, so salvaged as many of his credits as possible from his curricula and finally became a lawyer. Much to his disgust and dismay, he found that a lawyer's life was a continual round of mental disturbances and fatiguing chin-exercise. What he really wanted was a job that required the minimum amount of both physical and mental exertion.

After a careful review of all the possible occupations fitting his requirements, McCann concluded that the life of an anthropologist in the South Seas would be the most ideal.

He bought a second-hand book on anthropology, skimmed through it in one evening, then called on the director of an expedition that was about to depart for the Bismark Archipelago in the South Pacific. McCann proceeded to dumfound the fussy and pedantic director with an unintelligible jumble of technical-sounding, spontaneously-coined words, and much to his surprise landed a job with the expedition.

McCann built himself a crude shack in the native village of Tambu. It was not long before he had won the com-

plete confidence and respect of the natives and aroused the alarm of the other anthropologists, who feared that he was "going native", because he insisted on living with the natives; he accepted their mode of living and was even initiated into the secrets of the Haus Tambarin—the secret society of the forbidden temple of men.

●

McCANN WAS six feet, six inches in height and as thin as a rail. His huge pith-helmet, covered with a mosquito-net tucked beneath a once-white-but-now-gray cotton jacket, accentuated his slimness. There was a loose diassociation of his bones, that gave him the appearance of a disintregating skeleton as he loped easily along the trail to Marienberg where a government boat would take him to Ambunti. The little messenger followed McCann's long strides with a fast dog-trot.

McCann glanced back at the messenger several times when his breathing became labored, and grinned. It was a quick and friendly grin that appeared to divide his long face from ear to ear, and his blue eyes squinted beneath sandy eyebrows that acted as convenient sunshades in the sharp tropical sun.

During World War II, he and Jason French had become inseparable friends. They had worked together on many subversive matters instigated by the enemy agents among the natives of New Guinea. Now, after six years, French was continually disturbing McCann's anthropological siesta with urgent requests for help in matters within the extensive scope of McCann's acquired knowledge of native customs and laws.

McCann's first reaction to each of French's requests for assistance was always that of bored irritation; but invariably, as he remembered the many times that he had proved French wrong in his deductions of native behaviour, he had to admit that there might be a bit of sadistic satisfaction in making poor old French lose face with himself. His irritation would disappear and a feeling of anticipation and challenge would take its place.

This case was different. Cham Ngwai was accused of murdering old chief Namdangku, and McCann had persuaded French—over French's skeptical belief in Cham's ability—to give him a job on the native police force. McCann's thin lips became a straight line and his stride lengthened at least three inches as he thought of French's opportunity for retaliation.

French wouldn't make any comment when he saw McCann—he wouldn't have to; he was a past master in the delicate art of mental skewering. McCann dreaded the inevitable 'silent treatment' that French was sure to administer at this most unfortunate, yet opportune, opening.

McCann drew himself up to his full height and strode into French's office in Marienberg. He meant to gain the offensive before French would have time to get set—he'd put French on the defense—offense was generally the best defense.

"Well, I'm here," he said shortly as French looked up from a letter on the desk in front of him.

McCann blinked his eyes in surprise. There was no smirk on French's face; neither was there the expected 'I told you so' expression in his eyes....Only a sharp droop to the corners of his usually-upturned lips and a worried expression around his eyes were evident.

"Glad you got here," he said with a heavy sigh. "This is more of a mess than I at first thought it was—it's clan warfare."

"What?" exclaimed McCann and squinted his blue eyes at French. "Clan warfare?"

"Kowi, Namdangku's witch doctor, is recruiting a war party to attack Tambu and Cham's father."

"What over?" demanded McCann, now thoroughly aroused.

"Well, Cham fell in love with Nam-

dangku's daughter, Maindji, and wanted to marry her," explained French. "As was to be expected, the old skipjack would have nothing of such business and ordered Cham out of the village.

"Cham came to me and I told him that I would talk to Namdangku, which I did. I tried to explain to the old hoppie that Cham was a good boy; that he had a good job and could support a wife nicely, but the old bounder backed in the britching and said that no daughter of his would ever marry an English toadier. I lost my temper and handed him the book. Of course it didn't do any good—in fact, it made him more stubborn."

AS FRENCH talked, an expression of relief spread over McCann's face....French was in trouble himself; French wasn't thinking about how Cham got his job through McCann's intervention. French had tried to play cupid and the arrow had missed its mark.

McCann suddenly felt very magnanimous—*he* wasn't the one who was on the spot. "Don't be an ass, Jason," he scoffed. "*You* didn't tell Cham to kill Namdangku; you aren't to blame for what Cham did."

"But—" French paused and looked up at McCann.

"But, what?"

"I—I guess I told him to ignore the old windbag and keep right on seeing the girl," confessed French uneasily.

McCann chuckled. "So what?"

"Well—"

"I would have done the same thing," McCann told him; "Namdangku's bark was worse than his bite."

"And then Kowi—you know he's the witch doctor and the brother of Namdangku—"

"A seventh cousin on the mother's side," corrected McCann. "The natives call all their relatives brother and sisters—go on."

"Well, Kowi wants revenge for the killing of Namdangku. He's making bad medicine in the Haus Tambarin right now; he's getting all the men worked up into battle fever—"

"I'll take care of that old faker," said McCann grimly.

"I suppose that I could send some of the regular soldiers down and bring him in," continued French wearily, "but we just can't make open moves like that against the natives, don't you know."

"No need to do anything like that," McCann assured him.

"I don't know what the Commandant will say when he hears about this mess."

"Forget it," said McCann with a quick slicing movement of his hand. "Leave it to me; I'll find out what's the matter and fix everything. Where's Cham?"

"At Ambunti. The police boat is waiting for us."

"Let's go," said McCann slamming on his helmet. "We'll talk to Cham first."

CHAPTER II

DURING THE trip up the river to Ambunti, McCann learned that Namdangku had been found by the witch-doctor, Kowi, on the river trail leading from his village to Ambunti.

"The first report that came in said that a scorpion had stung him," explained French.

"Who made the report?" asked McCann.

"Drum-talk. We heard that Kowi had found him lying on the trail with a scorpion clutched in his hand and that the scorpion had stung him on the right shoulder."

"Those native drum-gossipers are worse than old maids over the back fence for details," said McCann.

"Then the drum-talk began to change," continued French. "We learned that Namdangku had been murdered; that the scorpion-sting on Namdangku's shoulder wasn't a scor-

pion-sting but a wound from a blow-gun dart."

"Did any of your men make an investigation?"

"We were considering it when Kowi came in," said French. "He accused Cham of killing Namdangku, said that he had overheard Cham and Namdangku having a heated argument in Namdangku's house; that later he had seen Namdangku depart for Ambunti and that he was closely followed by Cham."

"Quite a pat story," said McCann. "I've never seen a blow-gun in this district."

"Kowi made such a fuss about Namdangku that we had him dug up and brought in to the laboratory," continued French, "and sure enough, the poison wasn't that of a scorpion. They found a piece of the dart in the wound also."

"Humph," grunted McCann.

"We brought Cham in, and by Jove, he looked as guilty as the old nick, don't you know."

"No, I don't know," snapped McCann quickly, "and I don't believe that Cham did it—go on."

"But you see, Archie, old boy—he wouldn't say a word except to keep asking for you."

"Exactly as he should have done."

"But, we found a blow-gun and darts sewed in his mattress."

"What?"

"Now take it easy, old boy," protested French. "That is the fact of the case. I personally opened the mattress and found the blow-gun—it was in Cham's mattress."

McCann's eyes looked puzzled. He pulled at his long nose thoughtfully.

"And who told you about this blow-gun?"

"Miwot, another police boy who bunks in the same barracks as that Cham. He overheard us talking to Kowi and after Kowi left he came—"

"Isn't Miwot from that neighboring hill-village of—" McCann tried to recall the name. "It's called—"

"Kishit," French supplied the name; "just two miles from Namdangku's village."

"That's it," said McCann. "Didn't Namdangku and the chief of Kishit have some trouble a few years ago over pig-stealing?"

"That they did," said French with a wry twist of his mouth. "Old Namdangku was always willing to take advantage of the white man's law if it helped him but refused to have anything to do with it if he couldn't benefit by it. He brought the pig-stealing case into our local court and we ruled in his favor and he got his pigs back."

McCANN CHUCKLED. "Oh, yes, I remember now; and you found out later that he had pulled a whizzer on you, and you had awarded him all of the Kishit pigs in addition to his own. I'll never forget the expression on your face, Jason, when you went out to rectify the mistake and found out that Namdangku had staged a big feast for his clan and that they had eaten all the pigs."

"We had to pay for all those pigs," added French sourly.

"I'll have a talk with this Miwot."

"He isn't too bright," said French.

"Then I won't be overburdened with the effort in questioning him," said McCann dryly. "How long has he been with the police?"

"Not quite a year—I've been thinking of letting him go—too dumb, don't you know."

"He wasn't too dumb to ignore the blow-gun in Cham's mattress," said McCann; "has he ever had any trouble with Cham?"

"Oh, no," replied French quickly; "they always got along together."

"Must have," grunted McCann skeptically; "squealed on Cham, didn't he?"

"It would appear that way," admitted French; "but you see he did a bit of bargaining with us before he divulged the information—he wanted a promotion."

"I suppose that's your idea of being dumb," said McCann sarcastically.

"I had to promise him the promotion before he would tell us about the blow-gun."

The expression on McCann's face made French look uncomfortable. He cleared his throat noisily. "Keep talking," urged McCann sadistically delighted.

French wet his lips. "Well, Kowi, you know, had accused Cham of having an argument with Namdangku the day of his death."

"Yes, you've already gone into that."

"But when we asked Cham about the argument, he admitted it."

"And the argument was about Namdangku's daughter?"

"That's right."

"When did you have your talk with Namdangku about Cham marrying his daughter?" asked McCann.

"About a week before," said French and then stopped abruptly.

McCann looked at him curiously.

French cleared his throat. "Maybe I shouldn't have told Cham to keep pestering old Namdangku until he gave up and consented to the marriage—maybe I'm somewhat responsible for the—ah—the accident, don't you know."

AN AMUSED grin began to spread from ear to ear on McCann's long face. He shook his head pityingly. "Little cupid shot an arrow and it turned out to be a boomerang.... How does Cham explain the presence of the blow-gun?"

"That's something I haven't been able to figure out," said French. "I couldn't get him to say another word after we found the blow-gun; he didn't look the least surprised, either."

"That proves he's innocent."

"I say now, Archie, old boy," protested French, "don't be so impossible. That boy's guilty; he knows more than he's telling. You're mistaken about Cham. Three men have supported Kowi's statement about the argument, and Cham's following Namdangku into the jungle."

"Natives are all liars when the witch-doctor tells them to lie," said McCann impatiently. "Kowi's a bad influence in that district."

"You can't tell me anything new about Kowi," said French. "We have a detachment of regular soldiers outside his village with orders to keep the warriors from embarking on an expedition to Tambu."

"I'll talk to Kowi," promised McCann quietly. "And when I get through explaining the facts of life to him, he's liable to be in jail instead of Cham.... For your information, Jason, I happen to know that old Namdangku was scared to within an inch of death of Kowi and that Kowi was waiting for an opportunity to unseat Namdangku and take over the clan himself. There's more to this mess than you realize—it's clan politics—dirty, clan politics, that's what it is."

"But this Cham business—"

"Just a native smoke-screen."

"Why didn't you tell me before about Namdangku and Kowi?" demanded French.

"Why should I?" countered McCann quickly and then grinned. "If I had told you, you would have worried, Jason old dear; and you know I wouldn't do anything to make you worry, would I, Jason?"

"The devil take your perverted sense of humor," snapped French peevishly. "If you didn't keep everything like that to yourself, I might be able to run this district with a little less trouble."

"Wanna bet Cham isn't the murderer?"

French scowled for a moment and then pulled a five-pound bank note from his pocket. "Match it," he said coldly.

McCann flipped a ten-pound note from his jacket. "Give you odds, Jason old top—ten to five."

●

"I'D LIKE to talk to Cham alone," said McCann as he and French entered police headquarters in Ambunti.

"Righto," answered French. "You may use my office."

"Where is he?"

"Over in the city jail; I'll have one of the turnkeys fetch him."

While French was making arrangements to have Cham brought to police headquarters, McCann ambled into French's private office, selected the largest of several high-backed wicker chairs, dropped into its wide and spreading arms with an exhausted sigh. He spread-eagled himself, first by throwing one long leg and then the other over the rolled arms of the chair and sliding the lower part of his back down on the split-cane bottomed seat. He squirmed and wiggled around in the chair until it seemed that he would unjoint himself. Finally, after having adjusted himself into a reasonable facsimile of a Gordian knot, he closed his eyes and was soon snoring lustily.

Fifteen minutes later, the door opened abruptly and a guard shoved Cham unceremoniously into the office. McCann choked a snore in half and squinted sleepily up at Cham whose frightened brown eyes quickly changed to pathetic relief when he saw McCann.

McCann began to uncoil his contorted frame. He yawned prodigiously and motioned for the guard to leave.

"Massa McCann," began Cham excitedly, but stopped abruptly when McCann flashed him a warning look by narrowing his eyes and glancing at the guard. Cham waited for the guard to leave and then waited expectantly for McCann to speak.

McCann's expression was like a mask of immovable and hardened clay. The only evidence that life existed, was a sharp and appraising gleam around his eyes as he surveyed Cham.

Cham was young—not over seventeen, yet had the appearance of full maturity. He was taller than the average native—almost five feet, nine inches in height. He weighed approximately one hundred and fifty pounds and his well-developed and sinewy body, covered with only a loin-cloth, glistened like wet ebony in the hot and saturated humidity of the sultry office.

McCann motioned toward a chair. "Catchum stool," he invited.

"Me stand please, Massa McCann," said Cham nervously. "Me stand. Me plenty too much sick in belly belong me. Me—"

McCann made a quick, arresting movement with his hand. "Massa McCann stop long this place to make talk-talk with Cham," he said and then changed into the dialect of Cham's village of Tambu. "Sit down, Cham," he repeated. "We will speak with the tongue of your father's people—there are many ears in the jungle and many unseen eyes in the shadows."

CHAPTER III

CHAM GLIDED to a chair in front of McCann with a fluid movement of perfect muscular control, and sat down on the edge of the chair. His shoulders projected forward expectantly; his kinky, black hair, trimmed into a regulation military pompadour, gave his heavy and regular features a certain quality of precise symmetry. His evenly-spaced, white teeth sparkled in the moisture between his partially-opened, ur[illegible]-shaded lips.

The mask-like expression disappeared from McCann's face. "I have heard much bad talk," he began and pulled his long nose thoughtfully. "I have come to help you—if you tell me the truth about all things... The truth is better than a lie told by a crooked tongue... I am your friend—"

Cham began to talk. The tuneful and rippling words of the Tambu dialect flowed from his lips like a musical torrent of water over deep rapids.

McCann held up his hand. "Wait," he commanded sharply. "I will ask questions—you will answer them."

Cham's shoulders moved backward and he sat stiffly upright in his chair.

"Yass, Massa McCann," he said obediently.

McCann spread his bony hands over the arms of his chair and levered himself to his feet. He looked down at Cham and smiled. "Tell me the truth, Cham, and I will help you," he said quietly. "Did you kill Namdangku?"

A second torrent of dialect spilled from Cham's lips, which, when condensed, was "no".

"And did you have an argument with Namdangku the day of his death?"

"But not a bad argument," replied Cham quickly. "It is true that many bad words did pass between us, but it is only the custom to make great arguments when marriage arrangements are begun."

"Did you make any threats against him?"

"Just the usual insults; that his ancestors were all pigs and vultures and he assured me that mine were made of chicken droppings," said Cham. "I also explained to him that I was a very wealthy man—"

"Which was exactly the truth?" interposed McCann.

"But, Massa McCann," protested Cham, "that is the way to bargain—he knew I am a poor boy."

McCann shrugged his shoulders. "What else did you say?"

"I insisted that I was the only man who could make his daughter, Maindji, happy. I told him that I had a good job, made plenty money and could give her a better home than he was able to give her. He asked me then how much I was prepared to give him for Maindji."

"And I suppose you got the best of the bargain," grinned McCann.

Cham's eyes became dreamy. A soft smile came to his lips. "Yass, Massa McCann," he said quietly.

"How many pigs did he make you give him?"

Cham looked up at McCann reproachfully. "Material value is never considered when one is in love, Massa McCann," he said.

McCANN considered Cham's answer for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and said, "I want to know how many pigs you offered Namdangku."

Cham looked down at his big toe and wiggled it slowly up and down. "Fifty," he said in a low voice.

"Where would you get fifty pigs—you have only ten," snapped McCann.

"I have saved all of the money I have earned as a police boy—I would buy the other pigs."

"Humph," grunted McCann and began to pace back and forth across the floor. Finally he stopped in front of Cham. "Why was Namdangku going to Ambunti?" he asked.

"Namdangku was going to ask Massa French if I had enough money to buy the pigs."

"Did anyone else know why he was going to Ambunti?"

"He told Maindji that he was going to go and ask Massa French if I had enough money to buy the pigs and that if I did, he would let me marry her."

"Good! I'll talk to her."

Cham's hand flashed out and his fingers touched McCann's sleeve. He looked up at McCann pleadingly. "Oh, Massa McCann," he cried eagerly. "Please tell Maindji that I did not harm her father—tell her that I am a good boy—tell her that—that I will die for her." Cham's lips trembled. "Massa McCann," he said earnestly, "have you ever loved a girl—like Maindji?"

McCann's bushy eyebrows popped upward in surprise, then slowly lowered over his narrowed blue eyes. There was a far-away look on his face for several seconds and then he scowled and said bruskly, "That has nothing to do with—"

"But it has," interrupted Cham. "Don't you understand what I am trying to tell you, Massa McCann? I am trying to tell you that I love Maindji so much that I could not hurt her by injuring her father—no matter how much I might hate him."

McCann's lips were a thin straight line as he searched the depths of Cham's black face. He drew a deep breath. "You have spoken with the wisdom of a wise man, my friend," he said and there was a note of trust in his voice that made Cham settle back in his chair with a sigh of relaxation. "Yes, Cham," continued McCann, "I believe you. I will help you."

With further questioning, McCann learned that Cham had followed old Namdangku to Ambunti; that he had found Namdangku sprawled on the jungle trail with a dart in his right shoulder; that he had heard someone in the jungle and had run as fast as he could to Ambunti; that he hadn't told anyone about Namdangku on account of the fact that he was afraid that people would accuse him of the murder.

When McCann questioned him about the blow-gun and darts found in his mattress, Cham said that he thought Miwot had killed Namdangku and had hidden the blow-gun in the mattress, because he, Miwot, had been a suitor for Maindji's hand and had been turned down by Namdangku on account of the pig-trouble some years before, between Miwot's clan and Namdangku's. Miwot had been on leave to go to his own village the afternoon of Namdangku's death; Miwot had avoided Cham the next day after he had come back from his leave.

McCann dismissed Cham and sent for Miwot, but it was learned that Miwot had disappeared within the last hour and wasn't able to be found.

French issued a special order to bring Miwot in and the jungle drums went into action; Miwot was being accused of the murder of Namdangku.

In the meantime, McCann went to Namdangku's village and sought out Kowi, the witch doctor.

KOWI, DRESSED in his full regalia of office, was shouting and haranguing in the midst of a group of war-bedecked natives. McCann strode across the compound toward the assembly. His shoulders were hunched forward and his arms bowed like a pair of pincers; his face was frozen with a coldness that radiated a chill into the hot atmosphere of the compound.

Suddenly Kowi saw McCann. He appeared to shrink in size for a moment as his legs bent for a spring that carried him toward the sacred Haus Tambarin.

McCann's voice roared into the tense stillness in the compound. *"Coward!"* reverberated and echoed McCann's voice in the jungle.

Kowi skuffed to a dusty halt as the word, *"coward"*, shouted in the dialect of the village, smashed on his eardrums. McCann stalked toward him like an avenging nemesis. Even though Kowi was completely masked, everyone could see that he was trembling with fear; his knees were vibrating erratically and his fingers opened and closed spasmodically.

As McCann came within reach of Kowi, his long arm flashed out; his hand grasped the ornate head-dress that covered his head and shoulders and with a terrific rendering jerk, unmasked the witch-doctor.

An astonished "Wah!" swept through the assembly of natives as they saw the witch-doctor deprived of his tribal powers with a completeness that allowed no doubt to remain in their minds as to its efficacy.

"Who dares make war-talk against his brother?" roared McCann in the dialect of the village and trampled the witch-doctor's head-dress into the dust. "Who dares defy the law and make war without authority?"

Kowi drew himself up to his full height of four feet and four inches. There was defiance in his eyes and his thick, bulbous lips dripped saliva. "I curse you," he shouted but his shout ended in a shriek as McCann seized him around the waist and tossed him into the air.

As Kowi came down, McCann caught him and swung him over his shoulders and then proceeded to pivot rapidly.

Another "*Wah!*" swept through the assembly as the natives saw their witch-doctor being centrifugaled into a stupor by the well-known "good-fellow-man" who had always been their counselor and well-wisher. They backed away.

McCann pressed a nerve in Kowi's neck as he dropped him to the ground. Kowi was completely stupefied. McCann turned to the natives. "Go to your houses," he told them. "I will talk to you later."

As the natives scurried toward their homes, McCann picked Kowi up and carried him into the Haus Tambarin.

McCANN'S voice was low and menacing as he propped Kowi up against a bamboo pole inside the temple. "It is my belief that you know who killed Namdangku," he said.

"Cham Ngwai killed Namdangku," he said doggedly.

"How do you know?" demanded McCann.

"Kowi hear Cham say to Namdangku that he will kill him."

"That is a lie," said McCann evenly. "Kowi speaks with the forked tongue of the serpent."

"Kowi hear Cham say he kill Namdangku," repeated Kowi.

McCann shook his head disgustedly and walked to the door of the temple. He placed his two fingers in his mouth and a shrill whistle echoed from the jungle.

Seconds later, French, followed by eight police boys, came out of the jungle and entered the village compound.

"Where's Kowi?" asked French as he came within speaking distance.

"In the temple," said McCann; "he won't talk."

"I don't wonder that he can't talk," said French with a shake of his head. "By the way, Archie, old boy, just where did you learn that trick of buzzing a chap around like a blooming helicopter—he appeared to have at least a dozen arms and legs. He certainly must not have liked that too much, don't you know."

"Didn't ask him," grunted McCann. "I want you to take him back to Ambunti and lock him up— I've got a hunch that he knows more than he's telling us."

"I say now, Archie, old boy," protested French. "We just can't go running around locking up natives without a reason, don't you know."

McCann looked directly into French's eyes. "I'll be responsible," he said quietly.

"I do wish you'd tell me what you're up to," complained French peevishly; "you keep all your plans to yourself."

"If I didn't and something went wrong, you'd know I was dumb," grinned McCann. "As it is, you don't know whether I'm dumb or intelligent—so far you think I'm intelligent, I like to keep it that way."

French shrugged his shoulders helplessly and told the police boys to take Kowi to Ambunti and lock him in the city gaol.

"Come along while I talk to Namdangku's daughter," requested McCann and they walked across the compound to the large house of Chief Namdangku, set on high stilts in the center of the village compound.

McCANN called for Maindji to come out. After a moment, a young girl came out of the house and walked to the edge of the verandah that ran around the entire house. She wore a bright-colored calico dress that was wrapped tightly around her slim yet well-rounded body. Her full breasts rose and fell rapidly and her white teeth flashed between her full red lips. Her skin was the color of chocolate and her small nose had a turned-up look—uncommon among the natives. Her kinky black hair was pulled back into a semblance of straightness and tied with a red ribbon at the nape of her neck, and her brown eyes were

half closed in the bright sunlight that reflected up from the yellow dust in front of the house.

"We have come with a message from Cham Ngwai," said McCann in the native dialect.

There was a perceptible flutter of her eyelids and a quick closing of her lips, but she did not speak.

A voice from inside the house spoke sharply. Her hand flew to her breast and then a smile came to her lips—McCann knew why Cham loved her—she had a quality of charm—even in a white man's eyes.

"My mother tells me to invite you to enter," she said and McCann was agreeably surprised with the quality of her voice—it was full and throaty and had the musical resonance of a muted bell.

McCann and French climbed the ladder to the verandah and entered the house. They squatted on the floor and Maindji's mother brought fresh fruit for them to eat.

Maindji confirmed everything that Cham had told them, and just as they were about to leave, added, "Kowi wanted me to marry his nephew from a clan far up the river. He is very ugly and deformed. I did not wish to marry him and my father sent him away—Kowi was very angry and threatened my father with many curses."

"Where's this nephew of Kowi's now?" asked McCann.

"He go on ship to work," said Maindji. "He has been gone many moons now.... Kowi said that when he comes back he will be very rich and can pay plenty pigs for me— I do not want him to come back."

"Then he hasn't been around lately?"

"No."

"Well," said McCann, "I guess we've got all the information we want here. Let's go back to the place where —ah—where they found her father; I want to make another search around the place."

McCann got up from the floor and started for the door. "Oh," he said suddenly and looked at French. "Jason," he requested, "would you mind letting me talk to Maindji alone?"

"I say now," exclaimed French, "what would you be telling a native girl that I shouldn't hear?"

"Run along, Jason, old boy," grinned McCann and urged him toward the ladder; "I'll be only a second."

As French descended the ladder McCann stepped forward and whispered in Maindji's ear, "Cham said for me to tell you that he loved you very much and that you are not to worry about him because he will be all right and will come back to you very soon—I also promise you that you will have your Cham within a short time... Don't worry— I'll take care of Cham for you—goodbye, and remember that he loves you."

Tears were in Maindji's eyes as she looked up at McCann's smiling face. "Thank you, Massa McCann," she said and ran into an adjoining room.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN McCANN and French arrived at the place where Namdangku had been murdered, McCann told French that he wanted to do some more exploring around the trail to see if he could locate the place where the assassin had hidden.

Finally, after about an hour of painstaking examination of the ground around the trail, McCann called to French. "Come here, Jason; I think I've found something."

French turned and saw McCann pushing back a branch of a small bush about ten feet from the place where Namdangku was found. "I say, Archie, old chap," he called out excitedly, "don't touch that bush—it's cashew, don't you know."

McCann's hand dropped from the branch and it flew back into place completely screening him from view. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"We eat cashews, don't we—they aren't poison, or I'm dead a long time ago."

"It's a first cousin of the poison ivy back home," explained French, "and if you're susceptible to either poison ivy or poison oak, you're in for a nice dose of cashew poisoning."

McCann muttered unintelligibly under his breath and then called, "Come over here and take a look at these prints."

French skirted the cashew bushes warily. McCann pointed to a packed-down spot in the spongy jungle earth where a person had stood. "This is the place where the killer waited," he said. "There is one excellent print of a shoe—see the heel—run down, and the sole has a well-defined hole in the center of it."

French squatted on his heel and examined the print. "I'll make a cast of it," said French and sent one of the police boys to Ambunti to bring back the plaster-of-paris kit. "It looks like one of our government issues," he concluded after the boy had gone.

"We'd better pick up all of Miwot's shoes," suggested McCann.

"This isn't Miwot's shoe print," said French; "this is an eight or nine and Miwot wears a twelve."

McCann scowled.

"Cham wears either an eight or a nine," added French. "You're being hoodwinked by that boy, Archie, old chap. Even his girl had a pat story—it was too perfect—she knew all the answers."

"Now wait a minute, Jason—"

"And," continued French, "Cham is the only police boy who always wears shoes wherever he goes; all the rest go without—they don't like shoes."

●

WHEN FRENCH and McCann arrived in Ambunti, French sent for Cham's shoes; when they were brought in it was found that every one of them was comparable in size to the cast of plaster-of-paris. None, however, had a run-down heel or a sole with a hole in the center of it.

"He had this pair on," said the guard and handed French a newly soled and heeled pair of shoes.

French looked at McCann. There was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. "There's your proof," he said shortly.

"Nonsense," retorterd McCann; "that proves nothing."

"We'll go to the cobbler's and find the old sole and heel," said French, "then you can go back to your siesta in Tambu."

McCann followed the cocksure Commissioner of Native Affairs into the cobbler's shop at the jail, and Jason French, the friend of Archibald Sylvester Brewster McCann, followed McCann out of the shop when they learned that the cobbler had burned all the rubbish in his shop the day before; that the sole and heel had no doubt been in the rubbish; that he couldn't recall the condition of the soles and heels because he repaired so many servicemen's shoes every day.

When they got back to French's office, French sent for Miwot's shoes. "I tell you, Archie," he insisted, "Miwot wears at least a twelve shoe—it's useless to force that theory down my throat."

"Just what have you got against Cham?" asked McCann.

"Nothing of a personal nature," said French quickly. "But I've been watching him for the last month or so and he's a bright boy—too bright. He's learned to read and write English—does a good job at it—"

"That doesn't prove that he killed old Namdangku."

"Why did he suddenly have to have his shoes resoled?" snapped French. "He wasn't going anyplace right away. He knows the score and just because he's your protege is no reason for me to overlook the fact that—"

"Now look here, Jason, old boy," grinned McCann. "You aren't afraid of losing that five, are you?"

French was about to explode, when the sergeant-major entered the office.

"Begging the Commissioner's pardon, sir, but Miwot took his shoes with him— I verified this myself, sir."

"Damme," swore French. "Have you had any word about his whereabouts yet?"

"None, sir."

"Sergeant," said McCann, "do you happen to know what size shoe Miwot wears?"

"A nine—wide, sir."

McCann leaned back in his chair. There was a needling twinkle in his eyes and he pursed his mouth pedantically as he stared directly into French's eyes.

"That is all," French told the sergeant-major.

As the door closed behind the sergeant-major, McCann pursed his lips again and inspected the tips of his fingers. "Size twelve," he said casually. "Cham has a small foot and Miwot has a large foot—I know because I have eyes and I can see—"

"All right! All right! A fellow is entitled to make a mistake once in a while."

THERE WAS another rap on the door and a man from the fingerprint classification department came into the room. "Just found some exciting evidence in the Namdangku murder case," he exclaimed excitedly and placed several blown-up prints on the desk in front of French. "I discovered a fingerprint of Kowi's on the blow-gun—"

"Of course you found Kowi's fingerprints on the gun," snapped French irritatedly. "He handled it plenty the day he was here trying to make us arrest Cham."

"But Cham didn't handle it, did he?" stated McCann.

"No, he didn't," said French.

"But his fingerprints are on the gun," said the technician.

French glared at McCann and cleared his throat.

"And also Miwot's," added the technician.

McCann grinned and levered himself out of his chair. "Loan me a five," he asked French; "I'm hungry and I didn't bring any money with me."

"But we've got a lot of work to do," insisted French.

"Loan me five?" McCann asked the technician.

"Here's your five," snapped French and tossed a five-pound note across the desk to McCann.

"Be back in an hour," grinned McCann. "Going over to Shanghai Nell's and get her to stir up a mess of sour-sweet pig."

●

After McCann had finished his sweet and sour pork at Shanghai Nell's, he went back to French's office and sent for Cham.

When they were alone, McCann began the conversation casually with, "Did you have the blow-gun in your hands at any time?"

Cham's eyes widened in surprise. It was evident that the question was unexpected and that he was trying to think of an answer. Finally he said, "Yass, Massa McCann."

McCann's blue eyes turned to grey. "Why didn't you tell me this before?" he demanded sharply.

"Massa McCann did not ask," stated Cham quickly.

"Cham!" McCann's voice cracked like a bull-whip. "That is no reason."

"But Massa McCann did not ask me," repeated Cham plaintively.

"Well, I'm asking you now!" snapped McCann; "and I'm warning you that you'd better tell me everything or I'm going back home and leave you to sizzle on your own spit."

"Yass, Massa McCann," said Cham meekly and drew a deep breath. "Cham was afraid to tell before. The mattress had been torn open on the side. I started to fix it and I felt something hard inside. I dug it out. It was the blow-gun. I was afraid; I didn't know what to do. I heard someone coming, so I put it back in the mattress again. Then Massa French and the witch-doctor, Kowi, came in.

Massa French go right to my mattress and find the blow-gun. I learned that Miwot had told them that the blow-gun was in the mattress— I know no more."

McCANN started to pace back and forth across the office and then stopped suddenly in front of Cham. "And, another thing," he said coldly; "why was it necessary for you to have your shoes resoled when you were in jail and wouldn't have any use for them?"

"The heel was crooked and there was a hole in the sole that let small stones bruise my foot," answered Cham quickly.

McCann scowled and grunted, "Humph," in such a manner that Cham said, "Cham always speak the truth, Massa McCann."

"What you *do* say may always be the truth," said McCann. "But the things that you leave *unsaid* amount to an attempt to lie."

"Massa McCann," said Cham and there was a tense earnestness in his voice as he looked pleadingly up into McCann's annoyed face. "I know that I was wrong in not telling you about finding the blow-gun in the mattress; but I was afraid because I didn't know what things had been said about me and I didn't know what to do. If Massa French knew that I knew about the blow-gun, then he would ask more questions and more questions and maybe I would say the wrong thing—maybe some one told Massa French that they saw me when I found the dart in Namdangku's shoulder— Massa McCann has always told Cham not to talk if Cham gets into trouble—"

"But I didn't tell you to keep things from me," snapped McCann. "You are to tell me everything—absolutely everything if I am going to help you.... I'll decide how much we will tell Massa French."

"Yass, Massa McCann."

"Now, Cham," concluded McCann. "I'm going to have another talk with you tomorrow. I want you to think over everything that has happened and tell me—*everything*— Understand? Everything."

"Yass, Massa McCann."

CHAPTER V

THE NEXT morning, McCann walked into French's office and said, "Jason—I want you to turn Kowi loose."

"I say, now, Archie, old chap," exclaimed French in surprise, "aren't you a bit balmy this morning?"

"I want you to let Kowi go back home," he continued and scratched his hand vigorously. "Set Cham's arraignment for day after tomorrow and tell Kowi that you want him to bring all of the witnesses who heard Cham threaten to kill Namdangku and saw him follow Namdangku into the jungle."

"But, Archie," protested French, "you know I can't set the day for the arraignment—the judge does that."

"Tell the judge to set it then," said McCann and scratched his hand vigorously again.

French leaned forward and peered at McCann's hand. "I say, Archie, but that looks like cashew poisoning," he said. "Better have Doc Smith paint it with some of that new lotion of his —it'll disappear in twenty-four hours."

"Have you heard anything more about Miwot?" asked McCann with a final scratch.

"Not a word," said French. "And you know, Archie, it's a funny thing about this Miwot. His disappearance is unusual, don't you know. We have many desertions, but they all go home or to the home of one of their relatives—we can always find them—they don't disappear."

"Let's wait and see what Kowi does," said McCann with an enigmatic smile. "Well—I'll be seeing you later —got a lot of work to do before tomorrow morning."

On the day of Cham's arraignment, most of the male population of the native villages was crowded into the court room of the police magistrate.

Kowi was the center of attraction. The natives listened attentively to his loud talk, but their faces showed no reaction to what he was saying. McCann moved quietly through the crowd, keeping his eyes on Kowi, and scrutinized every person carefully with whom Kowi talked.

Suddenly there was a *"Wah"* of warning from the natives in the front of the court room. The court bailiff, wearing the ornate and medieval costume of his office, stepped through the door behind the elevated bench of the magistrate, pounded his heavy mace three times on the bench and emitted a raucous nasal bellow, "Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. This honorable court is now in session. The Right Honorable Sir John Elkins, K.C., presiding. Everybody on your feet and face His Honor."

The magistrate, wearing a tightly curled white wig and a long flowing black robe, took his seat behind the bench.

The bailiff thumped his mace on the bench. "All persons having business with this court will now come forward and present their petitions."

A short and stocky native at McCann's side kept jostling him. McCann scowled down at him several times and finally started to move away, but suddenly changed his mind and looked intently at the native for a moment. The native was watching the proceedings going on at the front of the court room. McCann tapped him on the shoulder and motioned for him to follow him out of the court room. The native backed away from McCann, but McCann's long arm reached out and caught the native securely by the arm. The native started to cry out, but McCann's fingers flashed over the back of his neck and there was a dazed and vacant expression on the native's face as he allowed McCann to pilot him without resistance out of the courtroom.

THE KING'S Counselor presented the charges against Cham. Kowi and four other natives from Namdangku's village testified that they had heard Cham threaten to kill Namdangku, because Namdangku had refused to permit him to marry Maindji; that they had seen Cham sneak into the jungle and follow Namdangku along the trail; that they were sure that Cham had killed Namdangku on account of the fact that Cham was the only person on the trail besides Namdangku.

With other testimony added to that of Kowi and the four natives, the magistrate decided that Cham should be held under a first-degree murder charge.

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When French returned to his office after the arraignment, he found McCann waiting for him.

"I've given orders to have Kowi arrested and brought in to the police station," said McCann; "he should be here any minute."

"I say, now," exclaimed French, "why are you bringing Kowi in? The court has found reasonable cause to hold Cham for the murder of Namdangku—it's clear-cut and finished as far as I'm concerned."

"Cham didn't kill Namdangku."

"But—"

"I said, 'Cham didn't kill Namdangku'," repeated McCann.

"Who did kill him?"

"The murderer has confessed."

"What?" exploded French.

"He has involved Kowi up to his neck."

"May I come in?" asked a voice from the doorway and the fingerprint technician came into the office. He handed McCann a set of blown-up prints.

McCann squinted at them. "What do they show?" he asked.

"Identical."

"Great! Thanks."

"Anything else?"

"No, thank you; not now. Thanks."

"And now, if I have any right to know what is going on around here," said French peevishly, "what is the meaning of all this blooming business going on behind my back?"

BEFORE McCann could answer the door flew open and two police officers dragged Kowi, who was in a high state of dudgeon, into the office.

McCann moved toward Kowi with a slow and measured step. Kowi's face became terror stricken as he backed slowly into a corner. McCann made a quick pass through the air with his hand and Kowi threw up both hands and cringed down into the corner.

"Handcuff him between you," he ordered the two policemen. "He's going to be jumpy in a few minutes and I don't want him jumping out of a window."

The telephone on French's desk rang. French picked it up and snapped, "French speaking— *What*?...*Miwot*? ...I say, now—yes, yes, bring him right in— What's that?... McCann? Yes, he's here—damme I'm running this office—yes, yes, bring him right in."

"Was that the sergeant-major?"

"As if you didn't know," grumbled French. "What right have you ordering my men to arrest people?"

"You wanted Miwot, didn't you?" grinned McCann.

"Where—how—who told you— I say, now, just where did you find him?"

McCann turned and grinned at Kowi. "Kowi's going to tell us a lot of things, aren't you Kowi?"

A police officer entered the room with the native whom McCann had taken from the court room in the morning.

A snake-like hiss escaped from Kowi's lips. The native turned and when he saw Kowi, his eyes popped out of his head until a complete circle of white could be seen around them. He began to chatter wildly and tried to break away from the police officer, who gave his handcuff a severe twist and the native groaned with the pain in his wrist but still continued to pull the officer toward the open door.

"I say now," demanded French, "and who is *this* blighter?"

"Ask Kowi," grinned McCann and ordered the police officer to take the native into the adjoining room and wait for them to call him.

Before French had the opportunity to demand a further explanation, the sergeant-major entered with Miwot securely handcuffed to him.

"Where the devil have you been?" roared French when he saw Miwot. "Blimme if I shan't have you court-martialed forthwith... Sergeant— where did you find him?"

"Ask Kowi," interposed McCann quickly.

"You keep out of this, Archie McCann," snapped French. "This happens to be my jurisdiction and I don't intend to be flaunted by deserters... I shall find out where he has been hiding or I shall hide him within an inch of his bloody life."

"Me no hide, Massa Bossman," answered Miwot angrily and pointed with his head toward Kowi. "Dis bad fella Kowi, him hit Miwot on head, take Miwot, way, way, way, way up river. Stop long house belong nudder fella name, Wmajbai. Dis fella Wmajbai number two bad fella altime worse Dambitch Kowi. Dis fella Wmajbai tie Miwot on mouth, on hands on feet. Hide Miwot in house. Beat Miwot plenty too much—"

"Wmajbai?" questioned French. "Who's Wmajbai?"

"The handsome boy in the next room," said McCann with a jerk of his head toward the adjoining room.

FRENCH TURNED to Miwot. "Why did Kowi hit you on the head and take you up the river?"

"Dis fella Kowi, him plenty too much bad fella man," growled Miwot

and glared threateningly at Kowi. "Him come and talk to Miwot. Him say to Miwot— 'You wanna make marriage long Maindji?' Miwot say suredo. Kowi him say for Miwot to tell Massa French dis fella Cham hide blow-gun in mattress. If Miwot tell Massa French, Kowi will make marriage for Miwot with Maindji... Miwot fool. Miwot crazie in him head plenty too much. Me say do. Me go ketchem look in mattress—mebbe Kowi make lie. Me find blow-gun—Miwot plenty much 'fraid. But Miwot want to make marriage long Maindji— Miwot tell Massa French—thassall."

"And we have a complete confession from Wmajbai," added McCann; "he has involved Kowi right into the rope halter."

"And just how were you able to force a confession from a stubborn native?" asked French skeptically.

"When we searched him," said McCann, "we found a hypodermic needle and a package of powder. I suspected that he was about ready for a shot, so took him and put him in solitary confinement—well—we bagged not only the murderer but a dope-peddler as well.... He's been running the coast towns for the last four years.... Got the habit himself."

French began to look pleased.

"We also found that his shoes and the cast are identical. His fingerprints were all over the gun—they were the unidentified ones," continued McCann.

"And what part did Kowi play?"

"Well, Kowi is Wmajbai's maternal uncle," explained McCann. "It seems that Namdangku told Kowi that he had made an agreement with Cham to marry Maindji, but Kowi wanted her to marry Wmajbai. Kowi and Namdangku had a big argument, and Kowi told Wmajbai to hide on the jungle trail and shoot him with an outlawed blow-gun that Kowi had kept hidden in his house."

"I always knew that Kowi was the guilty party."

McCann looked owl-eyed for a moment at French and then continued. "You see, with Namdangku's death, Kowi would be the next direct male in line to select the new chief. He planned the murder to look like a scorpion-sting, and even went so far as to put a dead scorpion in Namdangku's hand; but Cham's unexpected arrival, and his knowledge that Namdangku had been killed, made Kowi change his original story of a scorpion-sting to that of the dart. He planted the dart-gun in Cham's mattress in order to get rid of Cham."

"And that's why we found Kowi's fingerprint underneath the other fingerprints on the blow-gun," concluded French.

"Remarkable deduction."

"But, Archie, old chappie," said French curiously, "how did you run on to this—ah this—this Wambie Jabay fellow?"

McCann held up his hand. "See this cashew poisoning?" he said. "Remember where I got it? Well, when I was in the court room this morning, this fellow Wmajbai kept wiggling and squirming and scratching himself, until I was about ready to tell him off; then suddenly I noticed that he had the same kind of water-blisters on his shoulders as I had on my hands. I remembered that Maindji had said that he was a most repulsive fellow—which I'm sure you will agree is true—and when I saw that he was wearing shoes, and that they looked very much like shoes that had made the foot-prints in the jungle, I took a long chance and took him in. When we found that the unidentified fingerprints on the gun were his, we gave him the works."

"Humph," grunted French.

"And now, my dear Jason," yawned McCann with a mighty stretch, "if you'll call up the judge and have him release our good friend Cham, I'll see that he goes immediately and tells the happy news to a young lady, who, I am sure, will make him a very good wife."

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"If this isn't settled, now, Philip will grow up to be a frightened young hoodlum..."

Little Philip was thoroughly scared, and unable to tell what had actually happened in the fatal shooting of his father. And Patrick Laing wasn't satisfied with the account that the boy's relatives gave of the tragedy!

CASE OF THE FRIGHTENED CHILD

By PATRICK LAING

THE BOY couldn't have been more than five or six years old; yet, according to the stories of his two elder brothers and his stepmother, he was guilty of the fatal shooting of his father.

I rested my hand gently upon his shoulder. "Aren't you going to tell me about it, Philip?" I asked for what seemed like the hundredth time since I had been summoned to police headquarters to try my wiles as a psychologist to induce him to talk. "I thought we were friends, and trusted each other."

I felt his small, slender frame tremble under my hand, but he did not speak—just as he had not spoken nor uttered a sound of any kind since his father's death, more than twenty-four hours before.

"It's no use, Professor Laing," George Carmody, the elder of the child's two brothers, said. "He's too scared to say anything. Scared of what'll happen to him if he tells," he added; and although my blindness prevented my seeing him, I felt that he was staring vindictively at his little brother.

Walter Carmody, the second brother, edged forward, as though he would place himself between George and the boy, Philip. "Cut it out, George," he muttered. "Phil isn't to blame. He's too young to be held responsible; you told me yourself—" He broke off, as though he had said more than he intended.

I ignored both of them, although what they said and the way they said it interested me. It was as though there was a thinly-veiled antagonism between the two brothers, and that they were now allied temporarily through force of circumstances rather than by choice. I turned to my friend, Police Lieutenant Kenneth McDermott, who had been leaning against the back of my chair during the latter part of my examination of the boy.

"There's nothing to be gained by questioning the child any further just now, Mac," I said; "you may as well call the matron."

As he crossed to the door to summon the matron from the children's shelter, who had been put in temporary charge of Philip, the boy's young step-mother spoke. Although she, like the two older brothers, had insisted upon being present during the examination, this was the first time she had made any effort to take part in proceedings.

"Can't we take him home with us, Professor Laing?" she entreated. There was that about the low, throaty quality of her voice and the heady scent of exotic perfume that trailed

after her every movement, which suggested almost tropical lushness. "He's so little—I worry when he's away from me."

I gave the child's curly head a reassuring pat, and rose from my chair. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Carmody," I replied, "but it isn't within my power to grant what you ask. I'm not a member of the police force, but merely a psychologist from the University."

She made a little, petulant sound in her throat, like a spoiled child that isn't used to being denied. Then I sensed a subtle change in her manner, and guessed that she was about to attempt cajoling me into interceding with McDermott on her behalf. But before she could speak, George Carmody forestalled her. "It's all right, Mildred," he said, his heavy voice dropping to an intimate reassuring tone. "The kid knows how to take care of himself; nothing's gonna happen."

The speech sounded to me a trifle odd; but before I could give it more than a single thought, McDermott returned with the matron. The woman spoke kindly to the boy, who rose and went with her willingly enough.

WHEN THE door had closed behind them, McDermott spoke to the three Carmodys. "We'll have to keep Philip at the children's detention shelter another night," he announced. "In the morning, Professor Laing and I will try again to get him to tell his story."

The older brother, George, muttered some unintelligible word of acquiescence, and started toward the door, but Walter Carmody stood his ground.

"Look here," he protested, "isn't it enough that George and I have told you what happened? Won't it be bad for Phil to make him remember—"

Mildred Carmody's languorous tones were like soothing fingers laid across his lips. "Hush, Walter," she murmured. "Lieutenant McDermott knows what's best." She turned to Mac, and I did not need eyes to tell me she had moved close to him, and was resting one hand beseechingly upon his arm. "But tell me, Lieutenant: If tomorrow Philip still refuses to speak— What then?"

There was a brief pause, then he replied awkwardly almost reluctantly, "In that case, Mrs. Carmody, I think it can be arranged for the boy to be released in your custody."

"Thank you," she breathed, and left the room in company with her two older step-sons.

When they were gone, McDermott addressed me. "Well, what do you make of the youngster, Pat? Is he refusing to talk through stubbornness, fear of incriminating himself, or is it —something else?"

"I think," I answered at once, "that it's something else."

"Meaning...?"

"Before I attempt to answer that," I replied, "I'd like to have the facts of the case in more detail. All I know is the little you told me over the telephone when you called me."

I heard the spurt of a match as he scraped it along the striking strip at the bottom of its paper folder, and a moment later smelled the rich aroma of his pipe tobacco.

"There isn't a whole lot more to tell," he began then. "According to the two older brothers—and what evidence there is, bears them out—they were getting ready to leave for work this morning when they got into an argument, which pretty soon led to blows. When the scrap was at its height, their father, who was a night foreman at one of the local steel plants, came home from work, and tried to separate them. They were all so intent on what they were doing that no one noticed Philip come into the room and pick up his father's rifle. The first they did notice was when the gun went off and Carmody senior collapsed with a bullet through his heart. Philip was still holding the smoking gun to his shoulder."

He paused an instant, then added, "We examined the rifle, and found it had been fired recently. Ballistics checked it with the bullet that was taken from Carmody's body, and they match. Finally the youngster's fingerprints—and only his—were on the gun in exactly the right places; so everything seems to bear out the brothers' story."

"Nevertheless," I remarked, "there are one or two questions I'd like to have answered."

"For instance?" I could feel his eyes upon me, alert, expectant.

"What were the brothers quarreling about in the first place?"

"Walter claims he can't remember; George says it was over Walter's having worn a favorite necktie of his the evening before without asking permission."

"Where was Mrs. Carmody during the quarrel?"

"Down in the kitchen making breakfast—the shooting, by the way, occurred upstairs in a kind of den. She says she never interfered between the two older boys, who were always bickering about something; of course when she heard the shot, she ran upstairs."

He paused then he asked, "You're not satisfied with the case, are you, Pat?"

"Are you?" I countered.

I heard him suck at the stem of his pipe. "I'm not satisfied that I've been told the whole truth," he admitted finally. "For instance, I suspect Mrs. Carmody was the real reason for the brothers' quarrel. She can't be more than a couple of years older than they are, and it's pretty plain that both boys are in love with her—or think they are. But since that can have no direct bearing on the shooting, I'm letting it ride."

I LET THE subject drop. "A few minutes ago," I began instead, "you asked me what I thought was the reason for Philip's unnatural silence since his father's death. Now I'll tell you; I believe the child is literally unable to speak, that some part of his experience yesterday morning has set up in him a mental inhibition, which makes it as impossible for him to utter a sound as though his vocal organs were paralyzed."

"I think I understand what you mean," McDermott said. His words came slowly like a man who is searching his way over unfamiliar ground. "Fright or shock caused a paralysis which is as real as though it sprang from ordinary physical causes. But why should it affect the boy's speech mechanism? Why not the hand that fired the gun, for instance?"

"Because," I replied, "the condition was probably brought about by something that was said. In any event, the child will be unable to speak until the inhibition is broken down." I outlined for him the plan I had in mind whereby this might be accomplished; also a theory which I held concerning the case.

When I had finished, he gave a long, low whistle. "I simply can't believe it, Pat," he declared. "But if you're positive you're right, I'll back you up. We've got to have the kid's story now, more than ever. Philip won't be convicted at his age, in any case. But, unless this is cleared up, he'll grow up to be a frightened young hoodlum."

With McDermott listening in on the extension, I called the Carmody house on the telephone. Walter Carmody answered. "What's wrong, Professor Laing?" he demanded as soon as I had identified myself. "Has—has Philip...?"

"No," I answered, "Philip hasn't spoken. But Lieutenant McDermott and I have worked out a plan whereby we may be able to make him speak."

"*Make* him speak?" Walter's voice had become tight, apprehensive. "How will you do that?"

"The quickest way is through a reconstruction of the circumstances

that brought about the condition," I explained. "This evening around seven o'clock, we'll bring Philip home, when an on-the-scene re-enactment—"

"No!" His voice cut across like a knife-thrust. "You can't force him—you can't force any of us—to go through that again!"

"You don't understand," I said. "None of you will take actual part in the re-enactment of your father's death; actors made up to represent you will enact your roles."

"I—see," he mumbled in relief that was not yet too sure of itself. "I'll tell Mildred and George you're coming."

He rang off then, and McDermott and I set about selecting and instructing the actors who were to take part in the reconstruction of the shooting scene that evening.

IT WAS nearly seven-thirty when, with the boy, Philip, between us, we arrived at the Carmody house. Mildred Carmody, who opened the door for us, attempted to appear gracious and at ease; but it was evident from her too effusive manner and almost incessant chatter, as she conducted us into the living room, that she was endeavoring to conceal the real state of her nerves. Walter Carmody, too, was obviously on edge, although he covered up by rendering himself as unobstrusive as possible. Only George seemed unmoved by the thought of what lay ahead.

"So you expect to make the kid talk by re-enacting the shooting," he observed, and there was ironic laughter at the back of his voice, as though the idea secretly amused him. "Well, you ought to know what you're doing, but it seems to me that what shut his mouth once would shut it twice as tight a second time."

"We do know what we're doing," McDermott snapped at him. "Have my actors got here yet?"

"They arrived nearly fifteen minutes ago, and are upstairs now," Mildred Carmody put in. "It's simply uncanny the way they've got themselves up to look like all of us," she babbled on. "But there's no little boy to play Philip's part. Couldn't you find one, or—"

"Philip will play his own part," McDermott interrupted her; "if everybody's ready, we may as well get started."

There was an instant's hesitancy, then with one accord they all turned toward the stairs which led to the second floor.

In the upper hall we separated; and while the others went into George's and Walter's room adjoining the den where the shooting took place, Philip and I entered his much smaller room across the hall, where I explained to him that he was to watch through the open door what took place in the den.

He climbed up obediently upon the edge of the narrow cot bed, where he sat beside me—still in that strange, unnatural silence. Although I had told him nothing of what was coming, I suspected he sensed something of it; for his slight body was pressed close to me and his small hand sought mine as if for protection. Then I heard the door across the hall open, and knew that what McDermott and I both hoped would be the last act of the drama was about to begin.

ALTHOUGH the entire performance was in pantomine, I knew precisely what action was taking place. There was first the argument between the two brothers, which became more and more heated until one of them struck the other in the face. Then came the scuffle, during which a third character—visible at this time to little Philip, but hidden from the watchers in the other bedroom—looked on, half fearful, half fascinated.

After a moment there was the sound of running footsteps up the stairs, and the father entered the room. At this point I felt myself grow tense, and I leaned forward almost without volition

to catch any sound that might furnish a clue to the reactions of the spectators in that other room. Would my reconstruction, now being enacted not ten feet from them, prove accurate? If it did not...

By this time, I knew, the father had seen the third figure in the room, and had comprehended the situation. Now he was addressing all three—his two elder sons and the other—and although no audible word left his lips, his attitude expressed his anger and disgust. With a final gesture of contempt, he flung out his arm in a gesture of dismissal, ordering all three of them from his house.

In another second or so, the climax would be reached. The third figure, now in full view of the watchers in the adjoining room, would dart toward the rifle in the corner, snatch it up, take aim, and pull the trigger. If my reconstruction was to have the results I anticipated—

There was the sharp crack of a rifle shot, and the dull thud of a man's body slumping to the floor. At the same instant, the real Mildred Carmody's voice rang out in a shrill, hysterical scream: "No, no! It's a lie! They can't say—

Almost simultaneously the voices of her two step-sons drowned out the end of her speech: "He's talked! Phil's talked!"—that was Walter— "I told you it wouldn't work!"

"Shut up, you fool! It's still his word against ours." That was George's deep-throated, menacing snarl.

There were more voices now, McDermott's and those of the plain-clothesmen who had taken part in the reconstruction of the crime; but I had no time to listen to them just then. My attention was taken up with the small boy who was whimpering against my shoulder.

"Mildred's wicked!" he sobbed; "she shot my daddy!"

●

"We got complete confessions from all of them," McDermott said a few hours later back at the police headquarters. "Both George and Walter were in love with their young stepmother, who admits she encouraged them. The old man didn't know anything about what was going on until he walked in unexpectedly on that fight yesterday morning, and sized up the situation from what he overheard before any of them knew he was there. Then when he threatened to throw them all out, Mildred snatched up the gun and let him have it."

"Just as Philip appeared from his room across the hall and saw the whole thing," I added.

"Right," he affirmed. "Walter says they all jumped on the kid, and threatened him with all kinds of horrors if he told, scaring him so badly that he couldn't talk at all. When they discovered what they'd done, George got the bright idea of pushing the murder off on Philip. Walter claims he didn't like the idea; but when George and Mildred both argued that the boy was too young to be held responsible for the crime, and that nothing would be done to him, he gave in.

"But tell me one thing, Pat." His swivel chair creaked as he leaned forward. "How the deuce did you know it was Mildred who had fired the shot? There was no actual evidence against her."

"To begin with," I replied, "the fact that Philip's fingerprints, and only his, were on the gun, proved he'd been framed. There should have been traces of other prints; his father's, for example, from the last time he handled it. The fact that they weren't there showed the gun had been wiped clean, and the only reason for that would have been to remove the prints of whoever had fired it last."

"And the boy was made to hold it afterwards, so that his prints would be on it," McDermott said. "I should have spotted that point myself. But

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"If Mike tries to leave, he'll be picked up in no time at all."

A HEAD FOR MURDER

Mystery Novelet by Daniel Pitt

Paul Danton knew that he could have killed Mrs. Wainard; yet, the DA "cleared" him almost perfunctorily. Why?

THERE WAS the *buzzz-buzz* of the early shift of mosquitoes around the garden house just inside the wall. The coolness in the wake of the afternoon's shower had evaporated. Danton tugged at his collar and his tropical worsted was sticky and clinging. He was sick and tired of waiting for a woman who thought she had the advance dope on a nice little murder; she was probably a psychopathic case anyway. It was some sixty seconds since that quick coughing sound had drifted down from the white clapboard house over the Sound.

"Some women couldn't even be on time for homicide," he growled in irritation. Then he sent the long legs of his flat body scissoring, and went up the path from the summer house. A

bug darted at his nose. He swiped it away and, as his hand came down, he saw a figure sliding out the ground-floor window of the house ahead.

The shrubbery swallowed it in the next instant, but Danton's trained eyes had noted that he wore no hat, was stocky, and had a furtive, scared air. Danton flashed around a bend in the path, then cursed; the path sank into a small hollow, and a line of blue spruce cut off view of the house.

Running hard, he came out of the hollow, eyes whipping. There was only the house, quiescent in the gathering twilight. The setting sun off the water gilded the panes of the glassed-in veranda on the sea side, and the man was nowhere in sight. It was as if he had never been there. Nothing moved; there was no sound save for the soft lap of the little waves on the beach beyond the sea wall.

Danton ran again, damp beige-hued suit clinging to his body, untidy black hair flopping. Once he put a hand to his horn-rimmed spectacles. The path took a twist the other way. Some distance ahead, beside a gravel path that rounded the sea side of the house, bushes swayed where a man had stepped into them going in the direction of the water. Danton wanted to cut across the grounds toward the water. But again he was balked; almost hidden by the wall of green foliage on his left was the lattice-work of the arbor that made a tunnel of the path. There was no aperture large enough for him to wriggle his lean body through.

He had to run almost to the spot where he had seen the shrub branches twitching before the arbor ended. He stepped through the wet green in white calf sport shoes with red rubber soles and peered. Down through the haze under the trees, he saw a running figure flit amongst the trunks. As the other dodged from view, Danton went into high himself. He had been a sprint man on his college track team in his undergraduate days, and he really took off when he got ankling.

He thought he sighted the fugitive again as he hurdled a fallen tree without a break in speed. The man had dodged off toward the left, but Danton knew he was gaining on him. Then something gnashed a chunk out of a small tree trunk a foot from Danton's shoulder. A soft coughing sound came on top of it. Danton knew when he was being shot at, even with a silencer, and dived for a heap of piled-up faggots. There was another shot that snapped a limb atop the pile, followed by the sucking noise as if to warn him to stay put. He put his hand to the pocket of his jacket where he wasn't carrying his own gun.

"How to get rich and save ammunition," he muttered at himself sarcastically. He counted five and threw a chunk of wood into the brush off to his right; nothing happened. He sprang and got behind a clump in a long leap. Still nothing. Sprinting hard, he burst into the open and made it to the sea wall along the front of the stubby point. It was a six-foot drop to the strip of beach, but only two feet of it was bare with the tide just swinging to the ebb. There were no footprints on the beach; and when he went to the side of the point where the brush overhung the water, he saw no one either. The man seemed to have vanished in thin air.

He hustled back through the trees and around to the driveway from the road. He went up the four flat steps to the unpretentious entrance and rang. It was a stout red-faced woman, obviously the cook, who opened up with a harried look.

He said his name was Danton and that Mrs. Wainard was expecting him. Wiping her hands on an apron, the cook said, "Yes. Come along with me, then," and led the way back into the hall that ran the length of the house. At a door on the left, she knocked once and then impatiently turned the knob. There were no lights on and it was dim inside the room.

"Thought the madam was here," the cook muttered. "Go in and wait while

I see if she's upstairs, sir."

DANTON walked in, realizing it was a library with a big refectory table across it to his left. Straight ahead was a broad window, out of which Danton could see the arbor he had seen coming up from the summer house. His opaque gray eyes did a double blink as he tried to put things together mentally.

Livid, quivering heat lightning filled the window frame like a white sheet, stripped the room of its dimness. Danton saw Mrs. Wainard. Crippled by a paralysis of the legs, as he recalled now, she was in a wheelchair over by one end of the refectory table. She sat staring at him with a drunken leer. He started to bow, saying, "I'm Dan—"

With a gentle motion she pitched toward him, then swayed over to smack the floor flat with a sickening thud. There was another flare of the heat lightning to show Danton the back of her head blasted away by a gunshot wound. Red liquid like glue matted her white hair. Beside her a dark brown Homburg she had elbowed from the table in her fall rockered back and forth on its round brim.

Aghast, Danton was conscious of the faint creak of a door hinge. A voice said, "It's murder, all right; no question about it. Nope, no gun on the scene. Okay, Joe, hurry it up; I'll be waiting. It isn't often the D. A. himself walks in on a fresh murder." There was the *clackety-click* of a phone receiver going into its hook.

The door of an anteroom barely larger than an alcove opened on Danton's right; yellow light from the naked electric bulb in it ran out like released liquid and washed over Danton and the corpse. A stocky man in a conservative, meticulously-tailored, double-breasted gray suit stood in the doorway of the alcove and stared at Danton. After a moment, he spiked a finger at Danton.

"Who're you?" he said sternly. "What're you doing here?"

"I'm a friend of—uh—Mrs. Wainard's. My name's Danton." He explained that he was staying at the inn and had walked down from the village to renew an old acquaintanceship. Which wasn't quite the truth. He fumbled in one pocket of the bizarre-colored summer suit, then in another.

"Here's my card," he offered.

The other took it. *Dr. Paul Danton... Metropolitan University. School of Applied Phychology,* Rowan read. "Hmmm. Oh, yes. Believe I've heard of you, Doctor—" he said vaguely.

"I've perpetrated a few books," Danton said.

"Oh yes, of course. That's it. I've done a little writing myself—short stories. Of course, that's only a sideline with me. I'm Niles Mansing, District Attorney of this country." He put out his hand affably. "This is a terrible scene to come upon."

He had dropped in to see Mrs. Wainard—Emily, as he called her. He was an old friend of the family. When he got no answer to his knock on the library door, he had walked in and found her dead.

"When I was coming through the grounds—" Danton began.

"She had just been shot." The D. A. plowed on. "Silencer, of course. No weapon around. I called George, the houseman, and sent him upstairs to take care of Miss Ethalyn. She's the granddaughter, you see. Then I got county headquarters on the wire." It was cut and dried, the logical steps to be taken by a cool-headed district attorney.

THERE were sounds of a slight struggle in the hall. The door banged. "Please, Miss Etha—" George pleaded.

"Niles can go to the devil! Something's happened to grandmother and—" The door flung open and a girl got her head and shoulders through the aperture. She tried to push off the houseman behind her.

Danton saw a slim hoyden of a girl

with reddish-brown hair in a pert feather-cut bob. She had on gray slacks with a double-high waistband; blue-and-white stripped basque shirt strained revealingly against her figure in the struggle.

George said, "Please, Miss Etha—"

She ducked her wide, carmined mouth for answer and started to sink even little teeth into the houseman's hand. She almost got free. Without seeming to move fast, keeping between her and the body on the floor, Danton glided to the door and grabbed her by the arms before she could get inside completely.

"Your grandmother's had an accident," he said quietly. "We aren't sure about everything yet. Little girls should be in their bedrooms doing their calisthenics by now. Look at that roll of fat around your waist!"

She drew back. "Why you—" Despite herself her excited eyes dropped to her midsection to check. Danton had her under the chin, smiling in his vague way, and wheeled her outside the door. Mansing had jumped and started with a jerk but he just got over there then. He went outside with the girl to handle the situation.

When he came back in, he made tch, tch sounds. "It's very unfortunate, very unfortunate."

"It's no joke—for her." Danton jerked a thumb at the body. Mansing said, "What?" twice and Danton said, "A brown hat wouldn't go well with that gray suit of yours, Mansing."

"What? Er—I don't wear a hat in the summer."

Danton pointed with his toe to the brown Homburg that had fallen beside the dead woman's body. "That's not yours?"

Niles Mansing stared, then whistled softly as if he had seen it for the first time. Bending, he picked it up gingerly between thumb and forefinger. "So the killer *did* leave something behind... Hmmm. Seven and five-eighths," as he read the size. "Too big for me. I take a seven and three-eighths. I—" He smiled weakly.

"When I saw him, he wasn't wearing a hat," Danton said.

"Who? You saw who—"

"The killer, perhaps," Danton told him. "Anyway, a man leaving this house by the window. That one, I think."

"Impossible," Mansing exclaimed. "I was right there in the anteroom telephoning. That door swung open just before you came in; he couldn't have passed without my seeing him." He said it argumentatively, hotly, then added, "Besides, that window has a screen on it."

Danton walked over. It did have. But on his right, an open door connected with another room; the window in there was screenless and pushed up as well. The D. A. swore hoarsely. "Why—why he couldn't have gotten away if you followed him to the water's edge, Doctor!... And to think he was right here in the next room as I phoned and— Come here!" He pointed out the window and downward. In the fresh earth behind the shrubbery was a clearly defined footprint. "Come on!" He led the way out.

In the hall they got some flashlights, went out the door and around the path toward the grove of trees. When they got to the beach, several feet of it were exposed by the receding tide. But there wasn't a single fresh print.

"He couldn't have taken wing," Mansing growled as they went back to the house. The sirens of the nearing police cars sounded on the shore road. Mansing barked: "Who's there? Stand where you are—you're covered!" His flash beam licked out to the figure in the shrubbery beside the house.

IT WAS Thoms the gardener, a stooped bag of bones in his fifties. He froze with a half-lifted window screen in his hands. He was standing beneath the window Danton had seen the fugitive leaving by. The two of them ran forward. It was as

they feared; the gardener's tromping around had obliterated the perfect prints left by the fleeing man. Mansing roared at old Thomas.

Thoms surveyed him sadly. "House's got to look right for the funeral, ain't it?"

The first car of the homicide squad rolled into the drive and Mansing stomped forward to meet them. Joe Fulmer, a big Newfoundland of a man with shrewd bits of eyes almost lost in the fat folds of his face, was the chief inspector of Homicide. The medical examiner looked like a little terrier trotting beside him. Fulmer was in awe of Mansing, never venturing an opinion or giving an order without an "Okay, chief?" to the D. A.

There was the usual routine of photographing and measuring and dusting the place for fingerprints. The M. E. pronounced death instantaneous, with powder burns around the wound, indicating the gun had been held almost against the victim's head. They found nothing more than the hat, size seven and five-eighths. Fulmer looked around and indicated Danton with a jerk of his head.

"Dr. Danton's all in the clear, Joe," Mansing said promptly. "Friend of the family; he couldn't have done it. Let's get to the grilling."

Paul Danton stared dreamily out the screened window. His mouth was jerked in a grimace of mixed surprise and disgust like a music lover hearing the Philharmonic hit a sour note. Mansing had casually cleared him of any involvement in the affair. *Yet, he, Paul Danton, for all Mansing knew, could have killed Mrs. Wainard, stepped into the adjoining room, gone out the window, and walked around into the house...*

2

ETHALYN, the only surviving member of the family of the murdered widow and the servants, were grilled in the hall. Mansing had sent some of the police down to scour the beach. Mrs. Robbins, the cook and housekeeper, knew nothing; they were having an apple turnover for dinner, and when Mrs. Robbins had an apple turnover in the oven, she stayed with it. She had let Danton in; that was all she could contribute.

George the houseman had a lot to say but couldn't contribute much more. He had heard the late "madam" say she expected Mansing, had opened the door for him. Mr. Mansing had gone back to the library himself as usual; he was a frequent visitor. George then had other duties.

Ethalyn was next. She was on the big hall seat, sitting straightly tense, interlocked hands twisting. Mansing sat down beside her and put his arm around her shoulders in a familiar way. "Now, Ethalyn, we want to make this as easy as possible for you. I know it isn't very pleasant. But—"

The girl twisted on him, something almost akin to hatred bared on her saucy face for an instant. "What do you want to know, Niles Mansing? Perhaps I can tell a lot of things that—"

He smiled indulgently and attempted to pat one of her hands. "Now, Etha, please. We're all your friends. We—"

Her mouth jerked bitterly. "Remember your duty, Niles! Get down to business... What?"

It was the D. A's turn to bridle. "Where's Mike—Mike Spence?"

Etha smiled enigmatically. "I haven't seen Mike today; I don't know where he is, Niles... Have you tried his room?"

The D. A's eyes narrowed. "Yes, we have. When I phoned the report of the—the murder—to—Fulmer, I told Joe to check. Mike wasn't at his room... And he hasn't come in yet either...because we haven't received word from the officer we have waiting there."

The girl was on her feet, smiling in a hard way but a-quiver. Danton admired her nerve. He knew she was scared but she wouldn't admit it. "Too

bad, isn't it, Niles, that Mike doesn't wait around in his room for—for a murder to happen so you can find him when you want him. You aren't trying to hang this on Mike, are you, Niles?"

He hit his feet, flushing. She laughed at him and ran up the curving staircase from the hall. Mansing whirled on his heel. "Bring in that gardener!"

THE BONY Thoms came in, casually scraping at a stain on his overhalls with a putty knife. He said he was in his room over the garage in the early evening. He had had his supper, and was sitting at the window with a pipe, when George called him on the housephone and told him what had happened.

Mansing spiked a finger at him. "Did you see anybody climbing out of the west window beside the library? Did you see a man running across the lawn toward the trees and the water?"

Thoms shook his head. "Didn't see nothing like that."

"Your window in the back of the garage overlooks this side of the grounds. You can practically look into the library window, can't you?"

Thoms coughed. "Accusing me of being a Peeping Tom, huh?"

Danton spoke up for the first time, casually as he sat draped over a cardinal's chair. "You never left the window?" The gardener shook his head. Danton smiled. "It must have been a ghost I saw run down from the house and chased into the trees. He was dressed in brown and—"

Thoms showed some animation. "Oh, that? Yeah, sure. Guess you must uh been fooled in the twilight. Probably that big brown Great Dane of the Loesers next door. Big as a house. I saw him prancing into them trees sometime in the evening. Forget exactly when. But he's big as a man and—"

Mansing was on Thoms, jutting his jaw at him. "You can see what you want to, can't you? But I happen to know you can barely recognize a friend at ten feet with those eyes of yours. I've warned you to be extra careful when you take the station wagon into the village or I'd have your license rescinded even if you were Mrs. Wainard's driver. How the blazes could you tell whether it was this dog or a man—much less see him?"

Thoms was absolutely unperturbed as he dug a pipe from a baggy overall pocket. He regarded Mansing as if he thought him slightly stupid. "Got field glasses to watch the boats out on the Sound," he said. "Go up to the garage and you'll find 'em on my window sill now. I can see everything on the grounds with 'em easy. Why with them, I could look right smack through the window into the library if I ever wanted... Terrible powerful."

Mansing spun on a heel, dropping the questioning...

Two local reporters and the county representative of a metropolitan sheet were admitted. Reeves, one of the local boys, got Danton's name and said, "Say, aren't you the—" Danton gave him the icksnay with a left-right motion of his eyes and Reeves flashed him the airman's "Roger" with closed thumb and forefinger.

Mansing gave them a statement outlining the case and then they went down to the shore.

One of the police cars had been driven to the front of the lawn so its powerful, roof-rigged searchlight could be played along the beach. Nothing had been found. Mansing led them over to the other side of the point off the Wainard grounds. Another police car had been driven in across the dunes there and its search light ran its yellow arm along the beach. The party walked down toward the old Harner cottage, an empty, paint-cracking summer place squatting on the waterfront. Fulmer and an aide were up ahead.

"No tracks around this place,

Chief," Fulmer called back as a wan moon climbed into the west sky and was almost immediately veiled by cloud scud. "We'll take a look inside anyway, though." They went in, prying open the padlock on the front door.

Mansing trod around nervously. He said it was one hell of a job where the only clue they had was a brown hat. He finally bawled out to Fulmer to quit wasting his time inside. "The guy couldn't have flown into the place, and there are no tracks. You got to draw blueprints for *some* cops every time they breathe," he said to Danton. "You've no idea."

ON THE way back to the Wainard place, Danton drew off from the others. He found out Reeves had a car with him and they drove back to town together.

"Hat's the only thing to work on, isn't it?" Reeves asked. He was in his early forties, with the broken-down blood vessels in the nose that told of a man who likes to get comfortable with a glass.

Slouched down on the seat so his yellow-and-black checkered socks protruded into view, Paul Danton nodded. "Could be. Old hat. All labels removed except the size tab. Hard to check back on."

Danton himself was mystified. He had come out to Little Hills, the exclusive suburb community some seventy-odd miles up the Sound, to take a look at a phychological specimen. He hadn't expected to trip over a corpse first thing. On the staff of the Psychology School at the university, rated one of the most brilliant men ever graduated from it, Danton was attached to special research in a particular field of human behaviorism. It was commonly referred to as the Murder Clinic.

Danton was interested in murder from a purely objective viewpoint. To him, a killer was like a bug under a microscope. And that bug, according to his two published works—*The Behaviorism of Homicide* and *Murder Solves Nothing*—had to react in certain easily computable ways to circumstances ensuing as a result of the crime. Once you understood the circumstances, and figured out the pattern, you could pin down the culprit. *"No killer can escape himself,"* Danton had written.

He had solved one case five hundred miles away, working solely on a premise drawn from the printed facts. After that he had been called in repeatedly by the metropolitan police department; his books were considered authority by many police heads.

That angle had piqued him somewhat when he met Mansing. The D. A. seemed to have only the vaguest idea who Danton was.

It was the late Mrs. Wainard herself who had brought Danton to Little Hills. There had been a letter from her. She knew, she said, of a case where murder was definitely being contemplated; she challenged the theory that homicide was the last resort of a frustrated personality. Danton ignored it as another crank letter. Then there had been the phone call late last night.

She introduced herself as Emily Wainard and he caught the undertone of hysteria in her cultured voice. Intending to notify the local authorities as a routine matter for a check-up, he inquired about the prospective murderer.

"I'm enjoying splendid health but getting extremely impatient," she snapped back on the wire. "I shan't wait after tomorrow afternoon."

There was something in her tone that half convinced Danton. He made an engagement to meet her the next afternoon. He would come down the road from the village, cross the untenanted Harner property. She would see that the gate in the garden was unlocked and meet him in the summer house.

Danton had come to Little Hills, followed instructions to the letter.

Only Emily Wainard had been late for her last appointment...

"WELL, WHAT'S the next fatal involvement of the murder, Doc?" Reeves said as they pulled up at the inn, the Spence Arms, where Danton had checked in. He had read Danton's books.

Danton shrugged and they went into the taproom. He took a Cuba Libre with silver rum and Danton dittoed it. Danton led with, "This Mansing will probably crack it, won't he? He looks as if he was one of those smart guys going some place."

Reeves sneered over his drink. "Mansing is going nowhere and he's too dumb to crack a walnut in the dark." Mansing had been elected D. A. on the reform ticket—Reeves related—because the rival candidate stunk so. When Mansing's term was up, he would be out. His private practice consisted of handling Mrs. Wainard's affairs, especially her investments. Reeves had a brother in the local bank and therefore knew that Mansing borrowed money from the late widow for speculation of his own. He always paid it back; it was small amounts. "He's strictly small time," Reeves finished.

Danton waved to the bartender and said, "Have another. How's this Mike Spence get his name on the program?"

Reeves quaffed his drink, pushed back his unkempt hair and capsuled it neatly. Old family in the town. The inn named after the original hotel built by his grandfather. Lost all their money. The Kid, Michael, had been pretty wild and slated as the town ne'er-do-well till the Korean mess came along and he enlisted. Lieut. Michael Spence now, home on two-week furlough. He and Ethalyn Wainard, childhood sweethearts. The rumor was now that they were secretly engaged. "And the old martinet—Emily Wainard—was hot against it. She'd forbidden Mike the house."

"Why?" Danton put in as he set the example by draining his glass and signing for two more.

"Nothing, really. She just said Mike wasn't the marrying kind and she was awfully ambitious for Ethalyn, I guess. Thanks for the drink, I'll owe you a few the day I hit the jackpot."

"I'm getting value for value received."

Reeves took the hint and kept talking. They had several more, but what he had to tell now was merely a potpourri of town gossip touching on the fringes of the lives of the involved parties.

"Wha' I wanta know, Doc, is when comes up the next fatal involvement of the murderer," Reeves said, clutching at the bar lip when he swayed.

"When I can get that Thoms to tell what he's covering up, I can compute that," Danton said, but to himself. Aloud he said, "Hey, Reeves, you're sort of wobbly. Better grab a cab home and I'll stick your car in the garage."

Reeves thanked him as a "true buddy an' pal", went out and poured himself into the hack before the hotel and went away. Danton wasted a couple of hours sipping Cuba Libres. They seemed to have no effect on him. Then he took Reeves' little sedan and wandered up into the residential section before he headed for the shore road out to the Wainard place. He patted his coat pocket; he had stopped off at his room to pick up a .45 automatic.

HE WAS about two miles from the Wainard place when that station wagon came bucketing around the curve ahead, its gleaming varnished side swept by his headlights. Danton saw clearly the *Wainard Estate* labelled on the door panel. Then its bright lights were playing blindingly in his eyes; it rocketed by before he could tell who was at the wheel.

Danton eased his foot off the gas

treadle, wondering where old Thoms could be headed at that hour. He drove ahead, deciding to have a look at Toms' room; a little uninterrupted search might reveal something. Parking off the road down from the Wainard place, he walked on and through the gate. The big main house was absolutely dark. Keeping against the shrubbery, he followed the fork of the drive around to the two-story garage that was a converted stable.

It loomed ahead with a tiny light from the gardener's room gleaming wanly from a rear window. It was then Danton leaped into a dead sprint, travelling as lightly as possible. He had caught a dim figure moving over the lawn on the edge of that light. As he shucked out his gun, he called: "Stop! I'm armed. . . I can hit you as easily—"

Then the dark shape catapulted from behind a tree and smashed into him. Danton's gun was twisted from his hand as he was knocked sideward. He came off his knees swinging with surprising savagery for a man who detested violence. He thought he landed grazingly once and then that hand hammered down like a club out of nowhere. The dew-wet sod came up and kissed him full in the face with a soggy sound.

Paul Danton was tall and slim and so lank he looked as if he might come apart. Yet within a few seconds, he was struggling off all fours and running downward toward the garden and the water. Something tripped him. He glimpsed a bare white leg and grabbled with a body in the darkness as he went down. A slim finger gouged him in one eye. He tore at clothes for a grip and they came away from flesh. He struggled to a sitting position with a fist curling back, astride the other body.

"Brother, am I sore and do you catch—" he began.

The wind parted the tree tops and moonlight trickled through; he looked down at Etha Wainard with her blue bathing suit torn from one shoulder. He said, "What the hell is—" and stopped himself and stood up.

"I might ask the same thing," she said, rising.

"Where's the other one—the man who—"

She looked around baffledly. "Who else?" She pulled the torn suit around her as water dripped from her sleek tanned body. "Did you have a friend with you, Mr. Danton?"

He smiled sweetly. "My friends don't belt me in the jaw with a wallop like Ez Charles when he's—"

She chuckled and turned to point to her towel further down the lawn. "I had a rock wrapped in it," she said. "After all, I didn't know who you were." She had just been coming up from a midnight swim when she decided to have a chat with old Thoms, she said. She saw someone prowling about, tried to run, was challenged, jumped behind a tree, and swung on him with the towel-wrapped rock as he went by. "They taught us some ju jitsui down at the A. V. W. C.," she added.

Danton made a wry face. "Introduce me to your teacher some time; I want to shake her back teeth loose. Let's go up and see Thoms together."

She led the way up the narrow flight of stairs to the musty second story and rapped on his door. When there was no answer, she called. Danton leaned by her and pushed the door open. A battered bridge lamp overhanging the table was turned on. Beyond it, Thoms' cot was jerked back as if he had been roused suddenly. The draft created by the window and the opened door lifted the battered gray snapbrim hat on the table and rolled it onto the chair. Danton went by her, whipping his eyes around the floor for a corpse. There was none.

But when he picked up the hat and looked inside, he knew. Thoms was dead. The size tab inside the gray hat read: *7 5-8*

3

THERE WAS a house phone and an outside instrument right beside it. Picking up the latter, as Etha stood trembling in the doorway, Danton called the D. A.'s office in the county headquarters building. A man's voice told him Mansing was not in. Danton said it was most important he reach him.

The other said, "The D. A. is out in his car on the Wainard case. I think I can get him a message over the police radio."

Danton said, "Tell him Thoms, the Wainard gardener, is missing; I think he's dead. The killer checked his hat again; Mansing will know what I mean." He gave his name before he hung up. And then he felt like a fool; he could be tied in with this second killing, if a killing it was.

He put a hard eye on Ethalyn. "Back into the house, Small Fry! You're already getting circles under your eyes from lack of sleep. You don't know nuttin'—and never saw nuttin'—unless you want to get hooked in with another murder."

"'Hooked in'?" Her cute jaw hung. "You mean that I could be suspected of—I mean, in grandmother's case, I—"

He pushed her toward the door. "Who said you didn't do it?"

When he was alone he began to burn up cigarets fast, raking his lank black hair. His eyes kept swivelling back to the hat again and again. At first, the original murder might have passed for a routine killing, something the police would break shortly. But now, Danton knew, he was going to stay on the case, however unofficially, until he had pinned down the murderer for himself.

He had been certain Thoms held back something under Mansing's grilling. The D. A. himself had dropped the examination prematurely in Danton's estimation. If he could have had a word or two with Thoms, Danton felt the whole thing might be cleared up by now.

"But somebody else knew that Thoms had something—something he wouldn't tell," he muttered as he paced. "And that somebody got to him first—and silenced him maybe ...somebody he wasn't afraid to let in here, too. That would be the logical action of the first murderer."

Anyway, somebody was handing out hat checks to Hell damn rapidly. Danton's mind switched back to Etha, coldly, incisively. She might have executed the first killing all right. Then Thoms—but she could hardly have removed the body alone.

CAR TIRES sent gravel in the driveway spitting as Mansing himself arrived in a police sedan. With him were two motorcycle officers. Danton frowned as he heard the D. A. panting slightly as he hurried up. The D. A. had been very vague about who he was. Yet Manning had quickly eliminated him as a possible suspect, or had he?

Mansing came in shaking his head woefully, but his eyes twice stabbed sideward to study Danton. *Maybe I'm getting cut in on this one,* the latter told himself. Danton explained how he had happened in. His suspicions had been aroused, he said, when he saw the station wagon beating it wildly down the road. He had dropped around.

Mansing seemed to be listening only absently as he gingerly checked the hat. "Notice who was at the wheel of the station car?" When Danton shook his head, Mansing nodded and pointed to the size tab in the hat. It read 7 5-8. "Another chapeau that doesn't fit me," he said, smiling grimly.

A third officer came in. He shook his head as he beat wet sand from his boots with his gloves.

"Sent him down to check the Harner cottage again," the D. A. ex-

plained. "That means there were no footprints going in or out."

"The hat could be a plant," Danton suggested mildly.

Mansing shook his head patronizingly. "You amateur detectives and your theories! Nope. Man loses a hat on the scene of a crime. What's his first move? To get another to show that he has a hat."

"So he loses the second one on the scene of the crime?"

Mansing shrugged. "You amateurs are always thinking in terms of the perfect crime, and there is none. He had to get Thoms' body out of here, for one thing. Maybe something scared him during the job and he hopped out in a hurry."

Danton shrugged in turn. "Perhaps. But who said it had to be the murderer's hat— I mean, that it had to fit him?"

Mansing picked up the phone to call headquarters. Smiled smugly. "Nobody did, Doctor. Nobody. Who do you think the killer is trying to throw guilt on, then?"

WHEN HE got back to his room at the Inn, one thing stuck in Danton's craw. Even as he waved good night to Mansing at the curb. The D. A. seemed to overlook him completely in the case. His excuse for being at the Wainard garage could seem pretty thin....

He congratulated himself too soon. It was before seven the next morning when a county squad car called at the Inn to take him over to the D. A.'s office. It was a little more than a social call, too, Danton realized, when he saw a second officer walk around from the service entrance of the hotel as they got in the car.

Mansing greeted him with a big handshake but looked very grim when Danton came in the office. "We found Thoms' body," the D. A. said heavily, "up a lane about two miles from the Wainard place, in the station wagon. Shot in the head, too, like Mrs. Wainard; close-up job."

"That's tough," Danton said.

"Very." Mansing's eyes were drilling him. And they were unfriendly. "Dr. Danton, just what did you do with yourself last night?"

Danton started to tell about the Inn taproom. Mansing clipped him up short. "We know what time you left here, Doctor. Quite an interval elapsed between then and the time you called headquarters to report Thoms missing."

Danton smiled sardonically. "Next time I'll try to arrive at the deceased's domicile more promptly."

Mansing tapped the desk with a metal paper opener. "Another matter, Doctor... You omited to tell us a little detail last night. A short while ago, Miss Ethalyn was here. She met you on the grounds. It was—according to her reckoning—about twenty-odd minutes before you called called in here. That was at 12.18, your call."

Danton licked his lips. "Did she say anything else?"

"No, Doc."

Danton fired up a cigaret. The damned little wench was trying to put him in a jam. He said, "That puts her pretty close to the scene of the crime—at an embarrassing moment, doesn't it?"

Mansing's eyebrows climbed; apparently he hadn't thought of it that way. A secretary brought in some mail. The D. A. asked Danton if he had anything else to say for himself. The latter shook his head.

"Except that that hat wouldn't fit me, either. I take a seven and one-eighth, Mansing." He leaned over the desk. There was one largish rectangular envelope with a New York magazine publisher's return adress in the corner.

Mansing colored self-consciously. "Just one of my literary efforts," he mumbled.

Danton nodded. "I believe I mentioned it before—I've had a couple of

books published myself." Then he explained the character of them, studies in criminology more especially murder. He hinted at his police work. "Well, I'll drop along if there's nothing further, Mansing. If I can help you in any way on this case—"

The D. A.'s face was tight. "Yes, Doctor... Don't try to leave town; that's a friendly tip. There's no former charge, but you could be—shall we say, implicated..."

"Shall we say Miss Ethalyn could be, too. Mansing?" Danton dropped as he went out the door.

IT WASN'T heralded openly. The local paper with the report of the second killing didn't touch on it. But it seethed through Little Hills in dramatic whispers. Where was Mike Spence, rumored to be engaged to Etha Wainard? Why hadn't he appeared at his room? Could he be the murderer?

That wasn't good enough for Danton; it was too obvious. If Spence had fled, he would have been apprehended already with the alarm out on the tri-state police teletype system. On the other hand, if Spence was in it, Etha was too, Danton decided. If Spence were guilty, though, he was half convincing himself by hiding.

He had some breakfast in a local bean wagon, checking detail by detail over again with his cigaret. "If I could force the murderer into another move..." he mused.

He thought of his words with the D. A. once more. And then the thing began to mount in him; it was worth a try, anyway, he decided. In a phone booth, he called New York City and gave the publisher's address he had seen on the envelope in Mansing's office.

After that, it was a matter of waiting. It wasn't until the four o'clock train in the afternoon that the messenger arrived with the big bundle for him. It had started to drizzle. Danton got himself propped by the window of his hotel room that overlooked the roof of the Annex next door and settled down for a long read.

When dinnertime came, he pulled on a garish yellow slicker and went down to the corner restaurant. From there he called Etha on the phone; she was covering something or for somebody, just as Thomas had been. A half-scared feeling rose in him and he took a cab down to the Wainard place. But George, the houseman, assured him the girl had gone out almost an hour ago. Danton went back to the hotel, went up on the self-service elevator of the little place, felt for his latch key as he made the turn in the hall, then remembered he had left it in the door, an old habit of his in the absent-minded professor tradition. He sighted his door and saw it was ajar. Just as he lengthened his stride, that coughing sound that meant a gun equipped with a silencer came. There was a faint tinkle of glass.

He flung himself at the door in half a dozen strides, shouldered it open as he brought out his own automatic. The room was in darkness. But Danton sighted a hole in one of the window panes and then the yellow from on the floor in the same instant. Crouched low, he stepped over the body and went to the window. Out there in the rain, a loose hat flopped just outside his window sill.

Throwing up the window, he grabbed in the hat. But he wasted no time looking at it; it would be a seven and five-eighths. He went out over the sill onto the dark roof of the flush adjoining building. He thought he saw something flip behind a ventilator. But when he rounded it in a wide arc, he saw it was only a bedraggled piece of laundry some careless tenant had left out on the line in the rain.

He scouted further amongst the tricky shadows then heard the thump of a fireproof door leading to the stairs of a building below. He went through it and ran down a flight to the self-service elevator. Its buzzing stopped almost as he arrived and he saw from the indicator that it was on the ground floor.

REALIZING he was too late to head off the killer, Danton re-crossed the roof and re-entered his own room. Pulling down the shade he snapped on a light. Ethalyn Wainard in a yellow all-enveloping slicker like his own was just sitting up on the floor and rubbing her head. He dropped down beside her looking for a wound; but there was only a welt over her left temple made by the splinter of woodwork that lay beside her on the broadloom carpet.

He helped her to her feet and got her into a chair and gave her some brandy from a flask in his bag. She looked around dazedly as Danton saw where the splinter had been ripped from the door frame. "Let's have it," he snapped brusquely.

She was uncapping a lipstick unsteadily and stiffened with shock. "Let's have what. I walked in and somebody shot at—"

"Skip it," he knifed in. "Who's your accomplice—the bird who leaves these seven and five-eighths hats around as a calling card?" He flipped forward the size tab in the brim of the one he had found outside the window. This was another gray one.

"Are you insane?" she asked, voice tense and near the fracture point. "They shot at me! I—"

He walked over and picked up the phone. "All right. You explain it to the D. A. Nobody knows where you were in that house when your grandmother was shot. Last night I found you prowling the grounds right after Thoms is missing to be found later dead. This morning you went to Mansing and lied about what time you saw me—tried to shift the guilt to me. After all, I was dangerous I knew something. That didn't work so—"

She threw up a hand. "Yes—but wait! I—"

He tapped the phone impatiently. "Operator... Operator... So now you're in my room to get me when I came in. But I got here sooner than you expected so you didn't have time to get out on the roof with the boy-friend. He shot anyway—but a moment too soon. So I'm alive to tell the D. A. to come over and break his case."

"All right," she moaned, gesturing wearily toward the deck of cigarets on the desk. "What do you want?"

"You know what I want. Everything you've got. Everything you know—blow by blow—from start to finish. Do I get it or does the D. A.?"

4

"NILES—Niles Mansing has me over the barrel," she began in a matter-of-fact way. He keeps saying the break will come soon in the case... that it won't be long now. He's right; he means Mike."

"Mike Spence?"

She nodded. "Mike's leave is up in two more days. If he doesn't report back to the Army base, he'll be classed as a deserter and the government will be hunting him. But if he appears now—Niles will—" She stopped.

Danton slouched over the end of the desk and nodded languidly. "That thing last night you called a rock in a towel was Mike's good right fist, wasn't it, little one?"

"Y-yes. He came back last night and we were going up to talk to Thoms. Mike and he were old pals when Mike was a boy. He didn't want Thoms to get in any trouble over him. Thoms saw him fleeing, of course, and—"

"Where's Mike now?" She hesitated and Danton went "Da-de-da" lazily and reached a long arm for the phone.

"All right; he's at the Harner cottage."

Danton let out his breath in a whew. It seemed unbelievable. She explained briefly. When Danton had been chasing him, Mike had hit for

the side of the point and gone into the water. It was deeper there. He had remained out of sight by swimming in close to the bank beneath the over-hanging brush and going under water when Danton looked down. Watching from the altitude of her bedroom window, Etha had seen him make the cottage.

"But the police foud no tracks into the cottage."

"Niles and his men weren't very bright. It was a flood tide, Mike jumped to the porch from the water, leaving no footprints. When the police arrived, the tide was out considerably. It turns fast here."

Danton said gently, "But when we found Thoms missing last night, when Mike was on the place, Niles had an officer check the Harner cottage for footprints."

She smiled though she was pale around the lips. "Joe Fulmer and his sweet cops tracked up that beach beautifully. When I swam over with food and to tell him the coast was clear, I walked in their tracks to get in. We left the same way."

He started to rise from the desk he was sprawled across in a sort of uncoiling motion. "Very nice. Very very nice, wench. Mike goes belting out of the place like a sneak thief with hot pants. Opens fire with a gun with a silencer on a man who chases him—me. And your grandmother was killed by a gun with a silencer. Very very nice."

Her little white teeth stabbed into the butt of her cigaret. "Yes, I know how it looks. I—I was afraid myself at first. Mike has a terrible temper. But—you must believe me—I know—"

"'You must believe me,'" he mocked her as he stood over her, peering down sardonically. "There's a killer running around loose—and I must believe you, the little gal who rushed to the D. A. this morning to turn the heat on me! Yah!"

"I wanted to turn the attention from Mike."

"What was he doing in your grandmother's house yesterday?"

"I let him in a side door secretly. I wanted him to talk to Grandmother."

"That a pretty picture. Husky young buck goes to call on dear old white-haired grandmaw with a .45 and silencer in his jeans. Who did he think he was, Little Red Riding Hood?"

Her lower lip trembled. "He was carrying the gun because of Niles," she admitted in a very small voice. "He went into the library, saw grandmother dead, and got panicked. He knew he couldn't explain the gun on him. So he ran."

"Why was he carrying the gun for Niles?"

"Because Niles was trying to force me to marry him."

"Force? How could he?"

She slumped deeper in the chair, beige corduroy skirt rippling over her bare legs. "He held something over me—like—like blackmail . . . . He wanted to marry me.... He was getting very familiar."

"What did he have on you?"

She rattled the ashtray in a gesture of temper as she stabbed out her cigaret. "You got to know every-everything "

"I'm hunting a murderer. Maybe you don't care much but—"

SHE CAME out of the chair, a little sob escaping her, hitting her small forehead with fisted hands. "Granny. ...Old Thoms..." She flung around on him. "All right-t! The county police raided a tourist camp down the line one night I was there—with Mike. The names were turned in to Niles—so he knew."

Danton mumbled, "What was your grandmother's will? Know?"

She nodded. "Enough to retire the servants. Five thousand to Niles as an old family friend, The rest to me—more than two hundred thousand."

"Niles, eh.... Blackmailing you into marriage. So that's why your grandmother was considering murder...."

Her head came up. "Dammit, you know everything, don't you?" Her eyes flashed hate and then fell. "I know she was considering something—something desperate I had seen her handling that little pearl-handled pistol grandfather had left her; he had taught her to be a crack shot."

"How did she know about you—and Niles?"

"I woke up one night in bed. She was standing in the doorway. Evidently I had been talking in my sleep. Even as I woke I could hear my own voice saying Niles' name. A few days later she told me not to worry, that I would soon have nothing to fear from Niles."

He poured them both slugs of brandy. "Class is about to be dismissed. Comes the sixty-four-dollar question. Why did Mike want to speak to your grandmother?"

She downed the brandy and faced him with a crooked little smile. "To tell her that we had been married two days before he went to camp."

"Thanks, kid; I knew it had to be something like that. So tonight—"

"I came to see if you could help. You're the only one I could think of. Mike's leave is almost up.... Your key was in the door so I planned to come in and wait until—"

"And somebody took a pot shot at you—mistaking you for me!"

"Wh-what?"

"Certainly. You were wrapped up in a yellow slicked—just like mine." He thumbed at it on the bed.

"But—but you said in the beginning—why you accused me of working with the man who shot through the window and—"

"Lady, I had to learn a few things." He grinned impudently.

Her chin trembled and then she—my grandmother spoke to me was smiling back. "Doctor Danton about you—is there anything we, Mike and I, can do?"

He circled the room, then asked her when she would see Mike again. Etha hesitated. Danton smiled sweetly and made a gesture toward the phone once more.

"I can fix it so you won't see him for quite a spell," he warned dulcetly, "unless he wants to visit you in the county jail. And they'd love to have him there."

"You can't bluff me again!"

"It'll be your job to bluff Mansing. All I've got to tell him is that when I met you on the grounds last night, you weren't alone."

She gave. She said she planned to swim over with some food in a waterproof bag after midnight. There would be little moon then.

He nodded. "Got nerve?"

"If I have to have it."

"All right." He took her by both arms, fingers digging deep to steady her. "Say nothing to anybody. Not even to Mansing. And—no matter what happens—go through with everything on schedule—and trust me!"

AFTER SHE left, Danton wiped lipstick from his cheek—and got the D. A.'s office on the phone. Mansing was there. Danton said he had an angle on the killings.

"You have, eh, Doc? Well, that's nice. But we're awfully busy over here now. Suppose you drop in in the morning and—"

"Might be too late," said Danton languidly. "The killer might strike again tonight; he's already tried once."

"What's that?"

"Somebody took a pot-shot at me through the window of my room here at the inn, Mansing."

Mansing was professionally excited at once; he would send some men right over. Were there any clues? "Was there a—a—"

"A hat?" Danton lied coolly. "No. No. Don't waste time sending any-

body over, either. I think it's the same man who shot at me when I chased him through the ground yesterday afternoon. The fugitive."

"Why you never told me anybody shot at you, Doc." Mansing snapped. He sounded almost disappointed.

"Must have overlooked it in the excitement, Mansing. I'm certain it was the same one, and I think I know how to find him."

"Yes?" the D. A. said guardedly.

"Follow Ethalyn Wainard tonight when she goes swimming.... That little miss is a great one for nocturnal bathing. And you won't need a boat; just follow her from the shore. See you later, Mansing." He hung up.

Though it was still raining he didn't put on the yellow slicker when he went out. He was across the street under a tree in a driveway when the D. A.'s car slapped into the curbing at the hotel. Mansing and a plainclothes man went inside. They came out a little later and went away. Paul Danton ambled down to the main street to buy himself a hat....

5

THE RAIN had stopped and there was a balminess in the night. There was no moon but stars were out to wink in the inky puddles left by the rain. The soft air was lush with the fragrance of growing things. The sound of Etha Wainard's swimming a hundred yards off shore was no more than a gentle lapping that seemed to blend with the night. But Niles Mansing and Joe Fulmer with half a dozen men of the Homicide Bureau were intensely interested in that sound. They had almost missed her when she slipped into the water.

"See her?" Mansing asked Fulmer.

[*Turn Page*]

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"Just about, Chief.... She's moving west still."

"If this is some gag—" the D. A. started, panting as he stumbled over a rock in the dark.

"She's beyond the point now—and still going west," one of the men called guardedly. "Just caught her when that boat light flared across the cove. Going strong too...."

They were at the edge of the Wainard grounds, on the side of the point. They had to blunder back through the grove to the garden gate opening in the direction of the Harner place. Fulmer had stationed a man down there in the dunes and he was waiting and nodding vigorously as they came up. "She just passed this point," he whispered.

They moved along, crouched, skirting the beach. The darkness seemed to ink up. A multi-motored plane droned high overhead, wiping out the splash of the girl's swimming. They had lost her. Minutes passed. Mansing was swearing under his breath and mopping sweat from his face. The vague shape of the old Harner place grew out of the blackness.

"Somebody's moving in toward the shore," Fulmer said.

One man stumbled over a half-buried barrel and there was a sharp crack on the night. They all held their breaths. There was no sound of anybody swimming any more; came a sound of spattering water over the soft lap-lap of the waves on the beach. "She's coming out—with a bundle," Fulmer muttered, stabbing with his arm. "See her—walking up the beach toward—toward the Harner place.... Come on, boys."

THEY CLOSED in cautiously but hurriedly. The porch of the old cottage creaked under her weight. Her whistle came to them, two short notes and a lower longer one. And they

swarmed up on the porch from three sides. There was the *plump* of the bundle she carried and half a scream before Mansing himself cut it off by taking her by the throat. They slammed in the door and Mansing was right after Fulmer and behind one of the broader members of his squad as they hit the stairs.

"Give yourself up, Mike! We got you," Mansing roared.

There was still no answer as they came to the second-floor landing. Fulmer choking on a spiderweb he had half swallowed. Light seeped from the ill-fitting sill of a closed door.

"Knock it down, boys! And blow down anything inside it!" Mansing got to one side out of the line of fire.

One of Fulmer's men shouldered it and went flying inward off balance. He pulled up with a grunted oath before he tripped over the body. Mansing barged in, the rest on his heels. The D. A. blinked against the sudden glow of the little candle on the old table in the room. Then he made a squealing sound when he saw the body stretched face-down on the floor. It was the stocky brown-haired Mike Spence, very motionless the hair on the back of his head red-matted. There was a small splotch of crimson on the floor under one ear.

Mansing let out his breath. "Well, it looks like we caught up with the murderer at last! And when he knew he was trapped, he finished himself off and—"

Etha's scream almost tore the roof off the house as two plainclothes men brought her to the door. Her eyes saucered up with terror in her narrow face. Then Dr. Paul Danton moved into sight from the door of the room negligently shaking his head.

"Nope, Mansing. I don't think you've got the murderer—"

The D. A. goggled. "How—how'd you get here, Doc?"

"Had a hunch and came in from

[*Turn Page*]

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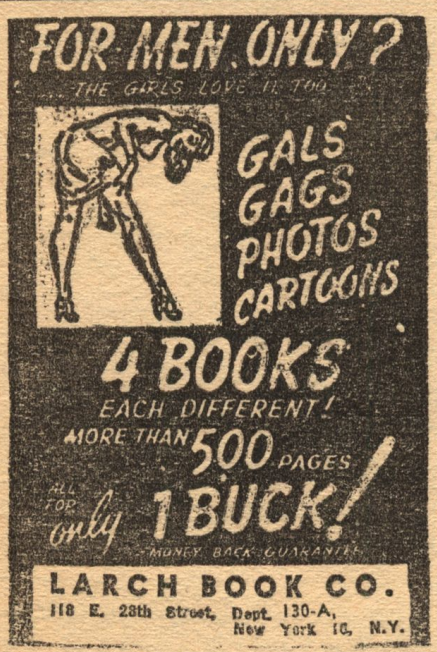

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the road. Mike isn't the killer. Look over there in the corner...the hat."

They followed his limp finger and saw it, a crushed-in gray felt like the one he found outside his hotel room.

Mansing looked baffled a moment. Then he went over and picked it up and turned back to the lantern to study the inside, mouth twitching.

"Hmmm... The old story. Size seven and five-eighths...too big for me. Well, I—" He seemed lost.

"That's what you always say, Mansing. 'Too big for me,' but you never try them on."

Mansing glared as his head jerked up and he strode toward Danton. "Doc, what are you implying?"

"Nothing much." Danton fumbled in a pocket, brought out a cigaret, put it in his mouth, and then went back into the pocket for matches. "Except that I was scouting around down here about quarter to seven." That was fifteen minutes before the time he entered his room to find Etha shot at by mistake. "I saw a man coming out of here, a man without a hat. It wasn't poor Mike here. Then—I lost the man in the drizzle."

Mansing made a laughing sound. "You mean—you're hinting it could have been me?"

"Why don't you try on the hat?" Danton drawled boredly.

Mansing looked around at the others. Fulmer looked worried; he knew the Chief hadn't been in his office from shortly after six to ten after seven. Of course—

Mansing clapped the hat on his head, chuckling his derision. "Why, this is two sizes too big for—"

It wasn't. It didn't come down on his ears; it fitted.

Mansing made a choky sound and looked as if his face would break. "But—this is crazy. I know. Why, those other hats—"

"You never tried them on," Danton reminded him gently.

"But I know!" Mansing brushed his forehead as if he felt sweat should be there. "They wouldn't fit me! They

wouldn't! I know because I—I—"

"Because you supplied them perhaps?" Danton said, taking away the breath of the whole room.

"Why—how—are you insane, man? You'd better prove a thing like that, Doctor, or I—"

Danton looked positively languid. He drew his hand from a pocket to reveal the butt of a .45 automatic cuddled in his fingers. "I don't know exactly, Mansing. Maybe I got the idea from reading some of your stories. Niles Singer is the pen name, isn't it? Very interesting stuff."

MANSING snapped, "That is irrelevant now. You don't make sense Doctor. This hat fits me so—"

"Which surprised you, Mansing—because you knew the others couldn't. You saw to that." He sensed Fulmer edging antagonistically near. "This has the same size tab as the others. But you knew they wouldn't fit—without trying them on. How?"

"Holy cripes, Chief," Joe Fulmer blurted, moving a hand toward the gun in his back pocket. It was the sign to Mansing that he was licked.

"All right, Mike," Danton said casually. "I'll recommend you for a job in Hollywood any day; you can get up now. Etha'll get that red ink out of your hair."

Grinning with relief, Mike Spence climbed to his feet before their astounded eyes. Etha rushed into his arms. Danton smiled.

"Sex is here to stay, I'm afraid... Mansing, I charge you with the murder of Emily Wainard and Jonathan Thoms. You killed Mrs. Wainard because she learned how you were trying to blackmail her daughter into marriage. She phoned you to come to see her, to arrange for the severance of all business relations. You'd be removed from her will, of course. You couldn't see yourself not only losing the five thousand you were to inherit but the two hundred thousand you'd have your hands on if you married Etha."

"You're crazy," Mansing said hoarsely.

"Only homicidalists are crazy like you were... You entered the house, shot her with the silencer, and went to the alcove room to report the murder. You were the D. A.; nobody would dream of suspecting you. Nobody would think of searching you for the gun you carried. It was nice, very very nice. Then you got another break. You saw Mike enter the room, see the old lady dead, and flee. You didn't grab him then because you never figured you'd find a gun on him, that's why you were so disappointed when I called tonight and told you the fugitive had shot at me that evening. Who's got a match?"

One of the Homicide Squad held a light for him. Danton went on. "When you cross-examined old Thoms and learned he had field glasses—that he could see right into the library if he wished—you lost your nerve. You were afraid of what he might have seen. You had to remove him from the picture, the first involvement... You did, slugging him in his room and driving him away in the station wagon to kill him in the lane. You again left a hat—a too-big hat! Well?"

"You're crazy," was all Mansing could say again.

"Last night I mentioned to you the hat could be a false clue. Today when somehow you heard—from your publisher maybe—that I had picked up all your stories—you got scared again. You were afraid I'd read something and hook it up with this.

"Well, Mansing, I did. I read that story of yours called, 'The Case of the Oversized Footprints.' Remember it? The only clue the cops had for a series of crimes was a footprint. But it wouldn't fit any of the suspects—

[*Turn Page*]

too big—like the hat in this case. When they finally got the killer, they found he had been wearing shoes two sizes oversize in the commission of his crimes. Catch? You were afraid of that, Mansing; knew I was suspicious. So you got on the roof of the Annex and tried to shoot me as I entered the room. The rain slicker fooled you; you shot at Etha by mistake. Had she been as tall as I am, she'd be dead now. You were baffled when you walked in here—into my trap—and saw the hat, the same hat you thought you'd left outside my window. And then—it fitted....All right, Fulmer, I guess you know your duty—"

"Hold it!" Mansing had leaped partly behind the portly chief inspector. Under cover of his body, the D. A. hooked the Police Positive from his own back pocket. Then he was backing out the door, the helpless, bewildered Fulmer backing with him, a human shield, as ordered. There was nothing to be done.

"First man who moves, Fulmer's dead," Mansing husked. They went down the stairs, slowly, Fulmer's face a mess of shaking putty.

THE ONES in the room peered out the doorway. The other two got to the bottom. The front door stuck. Mansing's gun raised and fell. Fulmer curled up on the dusty floor.

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Danton went by Mike and the girl and along the landing forward in the house. Into another room. Off that room a balcony ran across the front of the house Danton kicked loose the door and got out on it. But the balcony was sunken into the front of the place, the eaves of the roof cutting off a side view. Mansing was racing up the beach out of sight.

Danton shed his languid air and was over the railing in a vault. He hit the sand, went to his knees, then was up and running, gun firm. "Mansing, please!" he called once. The gun spat.

Up the beach, even as he swerved toward a dune, the D. A. went down on one knee. Rising, he stumbled on a few yards. Turning like a cornered animal, he cut loose with his gun. Leaping over the sand, Danton kept coming. Mansing fired again, the stabbing flame reflected in the water. And Danton zigzagged to slide to a halt; his weapon frothed. Niles Mansing, murdering D. A., folded up in the sand with half his head shot away...

LATER, rubbing the lump on his head, Joe Fulmer still couldn't understand it. They were standing out in front of the cottage trying not to watch the boy and girl down the beach. "Sure you got him—got him dead to rights, Doc. But what give you the idea there was anything wrong with the case—the way he told it?"

Danton smiled vaguely. "What pointed to him was that in the very beginning he made a slight slip. I

[*Turn Page*]

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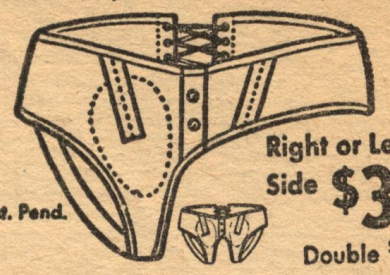

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didn't see it—in its true light—then. He apparently didn't know my official standing; I thought he was just being snooty about an outsider in the police business. Yet he cleared me of all implication... The same thing happened when Thoms was whisked off to die. At the scene, Mansing was hardly interested in my explanation."

"Yeah," said Fulmer, still puzzled.

"The next morning when he hauled me up on the carpet—he was getting a little scared. I had put my finger on the hat trick the night before; he wanted to put some fear in me. Then when I mentioned who I was—I saw right off he had never known."

"Yeah, Doc..."

"The rest was simple arithmetic. Mansing clearing me both times—yet not knowing who I was. Why? Because he did know who did it—he, himself. My cue was to provide a new involvement to make him move again. I called New York and got a private investigator—friend of mine—to go up to his magazine publisher and get all his stuff. There had to be quite a fuss—which was what I wanted—because he didn't know Mansing's pen name. Word got back to your late D. A."

"Yeah?" said Fulmer.

"He had to make his move—his play for me that luckily misfired. Then I knew I had him."

Fulmer bit on a cigar with an awed look in his eyes. "Uh-huh. But that hat trick, I still don't get it. How this last one, marked the same size as the others, fitted him. Huh?"

Danton dreamily eyed the rising moon. "I went downtown and bought one—one that *would* fit Mansing. Then I put the size tab from the hat I bought; that was what fooled him. That hat fitted him nicely—into the crime, didn't it?"

[*Continued From Page* 80]

"Blame a woman," Martin sneered; "Adam surely started something with that routine."

"A sweet pair," Brady sniffed at Franklin. "If harm comes to that boy, you'll burn for it. Go ahead and try to save your neck. How do we get the boy, safely?"

"Let me telephone," Franklin begged. "Anna willl be wondering why I h: en't come. We were going to leave the boy in the apartment and drop a card in the mail box. Anna told him he was to stay the night with her and that his mother would come for him in the morning. She put something in his milk to make him sleep. I'll call her and tell her that I had a little trouble picking up the money. I'll tell her to call a cab and meet me at the airport. Anna has our tickets for the three o'clock plane; we were going to Honduras."

"Okay," Brady growled. "You can call her in ten minutes. That will give me time to have her met when she hits the street. Describe her, so the officers will know her."

"I'll go with the officers," Mrs. Lane offered quickly. "I will point her out. Then I can look after my baby."

"Okay," Brady nodded, "but you'll have to come back here for a little while." He began barking orders into the telephone.

AT HALF PAST two, Mrs. Lane and Howard Martin were ready to leave Captain Brady's office. Martin was carrying the drowsy but unharmed six-year-old boy. Mrs. Lane's car had been brought from the park by an officer.

"About that job you are hunting, Martin," Captain Brady said. How would you like to join the department? We could use a man that stands right here in my office and wraps up a kidnaper, just because he said, *'give me*

[*Turn Page*]

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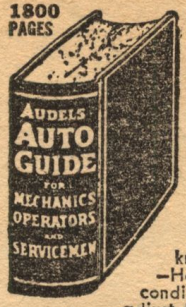

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that paper' instead of *'stick up your hands'.*"

"I spoke for him first," Mrs. Lane laughed. "I need a new salesman and office assistant now." She took hold of Martin's arm and smiled up at him. "Let's go, Slivers; it's time Laban was in bed."

Officer Connors closed the door behind the sleepy lad and his smiling custodians.

"That guy didn't do so bad," Captain Brady chuckled. "At midnight, he was going to bed in the park. Now he's got a job selling real estate. And from the way he talked himself out of a mess and the other guy into it, I'll bet he can sell it."

"From the way that little woman was looking at him," Connors observed, "I'd say he talked himself into more than a job. There must have been a leprechaun around the park this night, I'm thinkin'."

Captain Brady's snort lacked punch. Brady was Irish, too.

CASE OF THE FRIGHTENED CHILD

[*Continued From Page* 103]

I still don't see how that told you who actually did fire the shot."

I smiled at his persistence. "It didn't," I admitted, "but a little knowledge of human nature did. Walter and George were antagonistic to each other; if either of them had fired the shot, the other would have been only too eager to tell. Therefore the only person who could have fired it—whom both of them would have been willing to protect—was Mildred."

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I WANT YOU, KILLER!

(*Continued From Page 33*)

off another quick, desperate shot with the airgun.

A beebee gun does not pack much punch, but this particular shot, as luck would have it, caught Fanton right on the left eyelid. A man instinctively will protect his eyes, and Fanton's reflexive wince threw his aim off.

The moon-faced musclehead could move fast, in a crisis, for all of his beefy bulk. He reversed the gun, brought its stock around in a baseball swing, and hit Fanton on the side of one temple.

●

When Harry Fanton came to, he was lying on the unmade bed, where he had fallen. Moonface was in a chair, staring at him over the barrel of Fanton's own Luger. There were other people in the room, and Fanton suddenly realized his hands were tied together with clothesline.

The moon-faced man said, "Relax, mister; you ain't goin' anywhere till the cops get here."

Fanton suddenly had a terrific headache. He could picture the headlines: *"Resort Neighbor Nabs Fanton With Airgun—Notorious Killer No Match For Courageous Truck Driver."*

When the cops came, one of them recognized him, and the people backed away from him, whispering the name, doing their gawking at him from a respectful distance. He snarled at the cops and almost felt better about things.

On the way out to their car, securely handcuffed, he heard a familiar sound, and picked out a bird in a tree high above him. The bird was happily sounding its call and Fanton stood stock-still, listening for a moment as the cops charily watched him. "What's the matter, Fanton? Get moving."

"I killed that bird, dammit," Fanton said, half-sobbing. "I killed him. How can he be up there, singing that same damn' song at me, after I—"

"There's a million or more of them birds in this country, Fanton," one of the cops snapped, yanking him along toward the car now. "All of 'em sing the same song."

"What was the use killing it then?" Fanton said, and nausea came in him, he almost had to vomit.

"It's a good question," the cop said, and shoved him into the car. "You'll have a month or two yet to ask yourself that question, Fanton."

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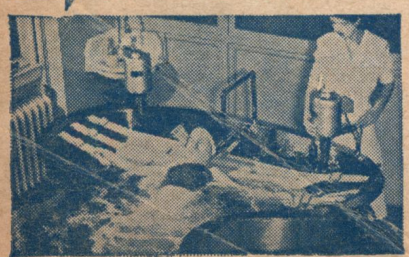

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